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Embodiment and Liturgy

Bruce T. Morrill

People assembled in worship and prayer constitutes one of the most common images of the Christian religion; indeed, it is often what people have in mind when they say ‘church’. While Christian worship has developed patterns and content specific to its beliefs from the New Testament period forward, still, as engagement in symbol and ritual it comprises activity basic to universal human existence. As symbol and ritual, worship is fundamentally embodied experience. This entry begins with a theological definition of Christian worship, and an explanation of its meaning and function in the life of the church. An overview of terminology for ritual forms of worship will come to focus on ‘liturgy’ as the operative term in Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and some Protestant denominations. Three theological understandings of the power and purpose of Christian liturgy are predominant among these traditions, both historically and today. Taken together, these understandings lead to an acknowledgement of the multidimensionality of human bodily experience in the ritual performance of faith within these traditions. Following sections explore how, from biblical origins forward, time has been the primary framework for liturgical worship – both through the corporately observed cycles of Sunday, the week, and the year, and through sacramental rites specific to an individual’s life cycle. Being corporeal, Christian liturgy is likewise a matter of space, and each of the major liturgical families – Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant –have distinctive environmental and artistic features. All these topics invite consideration of how worship can engage the physical and mental capacities of participants while respecting differences in their individual abilities.

Keywords: Liturgy, Worship, Ritual, Embodiment, Body, Symbol, Eucharist, Sunday service, Sacraments, Liturgical year

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1 Worship defined

1.1 The entire Christian life as worship of God

While the word ‘worship’ conventionally connotes religious ritual activity expressly devoted to praising, thanking, blessing, and beseeching the divine, the fundamental meaning and scope of the term in Christianity is far more encompassing. Worship entails the entire practical life of the church in its members. The key biblical text is found in the letter of Paul to the Romans:

> I appeal to you therefore, brother and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Rom 12:1)

With this exhortation to spiritual worship, *logikós latreía*, the apostle is opening a discussion not of sacred ritual or prayer (modern connotations of spirituality), but rather of how believers are to conduct their daily lives among each other and in wider society. The Greek (Stoic) word *logikós* translated here as ‘spiritual’ may also be translated as ‘reasonable’ or ‘rational’, taking into account the way in which a person’s thought and actions can align with the *logos* (the Word, or creating principles of God). For Paul, this reordering of human reason and behaviour to align with divine reason and behaviour is intrinsic to the very personhood of Christians due to ‘the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead [that] dwells’ now in them (Rom 8:11). This holistic concept of the person is what Paul means by ‘your bodies’ – that is, the entire person, both acting and acted upon (Fitzmeyer 1990: 1382–1416).

The basic purpose of ritual sacrifice in the antique Mediterranean world was to present an offering to strengthen bonds with or seek the favour of a god or goddess (in the case of Judaism, of the one true God). Paul transposes this conventional notion of temple sacrifice into a metaphorical symbol for the revolutionary change in one’s life enacted by baptism (Rom 6:1–23). New life in the Spirit of Christ is a matter of offering to the Holy One not a ritually slain animal, but rather one’s own ‘living’ self. The opening verse of Romans 12 is therefore a fitting introduction for the two chapters of instruction in Christian living that follow: many parts, one body; mutual affection and honour; love of neighbour as fulfillment of the law, etc. Another New Testament exhortation similarly instructs:

> Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. […] Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy

> priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:1, 4–5)

For those baptized, holiness is not narrowly identified with the separate – that is, sacred – precincts of temple and altar. Rather, all such ritual images and terminology function metaphorically to locate worship in the entire lives of Christians.

1.2 The human and theological necessity of ritual worship

The comprehensive sense of worship as Christian life does not preclude the types of symbolic and ritual activities conventionally associated with the term. Far from it. Indeed, symbol and ritual are an utter necessity in the life of the church and its members. This is due to the fundamental way in which humans go about making meaning or constructing their experience of life. Experience is always *interpreted* experience (Cooke and Macy 2005: 3–18). We participate in symbolic systems (the most obvious being language) so as to understand, to communicate, and to pursue purpose in our personal, interpersonal, and social lives. The content and convictions of one's beliefs – and especially their coherence in a comprehensive worldview such as Christianity – are only possible through habitual practices, shared communication, communal participation, and individual self-reflection. All such interpretive work is done through symbols and rituals, and through their mediation of the narratives and myths that shape our lives in the complex physical, social, historical world in which we live.

One of the ways that the irreducible importance of ritual worship in the life of the church has been captured in modern theological discourse is found in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963) of the Second Vatican Council (also known as Vatican II). This Roman Catholic text was readily adopted by multiple Christian denominations – Anglican, Methodist, and Lutheran, among others – as the charter document for reform and renewal of worship in their own churches (Wainwright 2006: 721–754). Fundamental to the Constitution is its assertion that 'the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 1963). This principle is grounded in early Christian patristic teaching: The church assembles in worship for the glorification of God and the sanctification of people. The transformation of the faithful in every aspect of their lives is complementary to the prayerfully gathered church's fundamental purpose of offering praise, thanks, adoration, and intercession to God. The bond between divine glory and human holiness is the redeeming person of Christ Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, he is present among the members in their prayer and song, in the community's leadership, in the proclaimed biblical word, and in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The assembled church prays both through and with Christ Jesus, who now sits at the heavenly right hand of God, actively joining his divine humanity with the people of God at worship. Christ's transcendence and immanence, his presence in absence, is portrayed in the closing scene of the Gospel of Matthew:

> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'. (Matt 28:16–20)

Notable is the disciples' worship of the risen Christ – an unprecedented symbolic act at the story's end – acknowledging his divine stature. It is the final moment of bodily encounter before they undertake the mission to which he charges them. Yet, that mission comprises an ongoing experience of his accompanying presence in their life's work of evangelizing, baptizing, and fashioning lives of prayer, community, and ethics in accordance with his teachings – all of which glorify the triune God revealed in and through him. Numerous other New Testament passages pertinent to the relationship between the glorified Christ and the worshipping body of the church contribute to traditional and contemporary theological interpretations of worship. Before discussing them, a brief review of Christian ritual terminology will be useful.

1.3 Christian ritual terminology

Through the discussion so far, it has become evident that 'worship' serves as the most general and comprehensive term for corporate Christian prayer. This is not least because it denotes generic activities that take place across many religious traditions, including praise, adoration, and supplication to the divinity or divinities – most often in some combination of demarcated (sacred) times and spaces. Reformed philosophical theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff has succinctly defined Christian worship as 'acts of learning and acknowledging the excellence of who God is and what God has done' (2018: 29–30). Worship therefore includes revelation of precisely this God who can only be known in the present through the believing community's recounting of what he has done in the past and has promised for the future. This makes essential the proclamation of the Word; preaching and the reading of scripture constitute a moment of revelation. Nonetheless, the revelatory event is only realized in the people's reception of this 'living and active' word of God (Heb 4:12). Their full-bodied response through symbols, gestures, song, and words, explains

Methodist liturgical theologian Don Saliers, encompasses praise, adoration, confession, intercession, and communion (Saliers 1994: 85–138).

The church at worship renews and strengthens the divine-human covenantal bond as it tangibly expresses God's faithfulness to his people and their loving trust in him. This faith is practised through obedient, well ordered service (*obsequium servitus*), a dimension of ritual worship that lends itself to being called a 'service'. Drawing attention to the sense in which the church at worship is doing God's work, English-speaking Christians widely refer to the 'Sunday service' or to 'attending services', just as for Protestant and Catholic Germans alike worship is referred to as *Gottesdienst* (divine service, the church service).

While the English term 'church service' has its roots in Latin and Old French, its connotation of ordered, public work for God aligns with another word now widely used as synonymous with worship: liturgy. This term derives from the Greek word *leitourgia*, meaning a work (*érgon*) done on behalf and for the benefit of the people (*laós*). In late Greco-Roman society the term referred to such activities as serving in the senate or paying one's taxes or serving in the military. Early Christians applied the term to their acts of divine worship, as well as to those ministering to the faith community. Eventually the Eastern churches limited the word to the celebration of the Eucharist. In the Latin West, official worship services were called divine offices or sacred rites so that the Greek-based word disappeared for more than a millennium. Only in the eighteenth century did it begin to reemerge in reference to the entire ritual worship of the church. Such is its general use now among Catholic, Anglican, and some Protestant denominations, while the Orthodox churches continue to identify the term strictly with the Divine Liturgy celebrated on Sunday.

The most prominent worship-related term to emerge from the early Latin church, persisting across Christian churches to this day, is 'sacrament'. In the emerging church's late Roman imperial context a *sacramentum* was a promise, a solemn oath pledged in undertaking some form of service. Entrance into such an order of service would be expressed by a symbol involving the body, such as the purple-striped tunics worn by Roman senators, the tunics and other insignias of rank worn in the military, or the practice of soldiers touching their banner when vowing allegiance. Latin Christians found the word *sacramentum* suited to what their participation in baptism and the Eucharist entailed: namely, their reception of the gospel message proclaimed in the worshipping assembly and their pledge to carry out in their lives the divine favour (grace) that they experienced bodily together in the symbols and rituals of the church. Gradually, *sacramentum* came to apply to several rituals, including those of penitential reconciliation and ministerial ordination, until in the thirteenth century the Latin church determined the number of official (priestly mediated) sacraments to be seven. A few centuries later, the Protestant Reformers would restrict the term to baptism and the Lord's Supper, while in Roman Catholicism the complex of

seven sacraments, and especially the Mass, became the predominant symbol of ecclesial worship.

2 Theologies of liturgical worship

At present, scholars across the major liturgical traditions largely engage three paradigms for theologically addressing what believers experience in liturgical worship: incarnation, paschal mystery, and sacramentality. Anglican theologian Lizette Larson-Miller, for example, draws on an ecumenical breadth of authors in framing contemporary sacramental-liturgical theology in terms of these three concepts (Larson-Miller 2016: 1–81). These theological approaches seek to understand how the Christian assembly collectively knows itself to be acknowledging, hearing from, and responding to – in a word, encountering – God through ritual and symbol. The following is a survey of how these categories, both in their biblical roots and historical evolutions, support and point towards further exploration of the irreducible bodily dimensions of worship.

2.1 The incarnational approach

Some of the most prominent and enduring theological approaches for understanding the church's worship through word and sacrament draw upon the doctrine of the incarnation – the teaching from John 1:14 that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word (Greek: *logos*) of God in the flesh (Latin: *in carné*): 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us'. This doctrine proved instrumental in the early church fathers' arguments against various Gnostic forms of Christianity that denied the goodness of the material world and claimed that the God and Father of Christ Jesus did not create this world, nor is Christ's saving mission inclusive of our bodily existence. In his extensive arguments against those holding such beliefs, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon (d. 180), enlisted the eucharistic practice held in common by both sides to point out his opponents' inconsistency. Insofar as the heretics offer to God 'from His own creation' bread and wine 'over which thanks has been given [as] the body of their Lord, and the cup His blood', they are either acknowledging that the Father of the Son is the Creator of the world and all within it, or else are making God 'covetous of another's property, and desirous of what is not His own' (*Against Heresies* IV.18.5). This bears positive, practical, and fateful implications:

> For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity. (*Against Heresies* IV.18.5)

Salvation, far from being an exclusive affair of the soul or spirit, is a full-bodied concern. Across the homilies of such fourth-century bishops as Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, deliverance from corruption involves both living a good and virtuous life that is pleasing before God, and knowing that the body will ultimately be transformed into fullness of life in God despite mortal death. The immortality of a person – of their body, mind, and spirit – begins with baptism when the Holy Spirit invoked upon the water washes away the corruption of sin and death, and the oil of chrism anoints them as a member of Christ's body. Weekly sharing in the eucharistic body and blood of Christ heals the effects of sinful failings and empowers a continued life of faith, hope, and charity (practical love) amidst the ecclesial body of Christ and in the wider world.

The centuries-long Middle Ages may be fairly characterized as a period of increasing concern over the power exercised in the church's public worship. The authority for not only leading but also performing the church's common prayer (offices, services) and sacramental rites became the exclusive domain of the ordained clergy. In Western Europe, the laypeople's posture became passive, watching the performance of symbolic actions accompanied by obscure and largely inaudible Latin while the figure of the priest and the eucharistic host he consecrated served as the central symbols of the body of Christ. Among the theological schools, Christology developed as philosophical theory about the incarnation – that is, about how Christ's fully divine nature joined with his fully human nature. Such theologizing dovetailed with explanations for how, in the sacraments, divine power operates instrumentally in and through human symbols (persons, actions, and objects). Eucharistic practice came to focus singularly on 'confecting' the Blessed Sacrament – the transformation of the wheaten wafer ('the host') and chalice of wine into Christ's body and blood – which was signaled by bells and, in more solemn celebrations, venerated with incense. Beginning in the thirteenth century, the widespread feast of *Corpus Christi* (the Body of Christ) entailed a street procession of ordered ranks of the citizenry followed by a cleric carrying the Blessed Sacrament under a canopy with candles. These rituals catalyzed a shift in ecclesial worship towards prayers of supplication and a bodily posture of adoration before the miraculous divine presence in the sacramental wafer. At the same time, a generally transactional notion of sacramental grace lent itself to hierarchies of power (ecclesial and governmental offices) and finance (guilds, noble ranks, and indulgences).

The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation rejected the ecclesial focus on material symbols and hierarchical mediators, asserting instead the divine power in the proclaimed biblical word as received by the intellectual assent of faith. Reacting to the Protestant emphasis on 'scripture alone' (*sola scriptura*), the Roman Catholic bishops at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) reinforced the sacred power of both the sacramental symbols

and the priestly hierarchy enacting them. Although the theology of the incarnation affirms the goodness of the body and informs eucharistic practice as a joining of divinity with humanity, power hierarchies prevented this from tickling down to the laypeople's experience in worship. Protestant worship – by focusing so singularly on the verbal content of scripture – failed to correct this distancing of God from bodily human experience. The practical result for both branches of Western Christianity was a widespread loss of the early Christian integration of worship with daily ethical life as the worship of God.

2.2 The paschal mystery approach

By the late nineteenth century, the consequences of European political revolutions and wars led certain northwest-continental Benedictine monasteries to assess the need for renewal of their foundations and ritual practices with a view towards those of the wider church. A central objective was to restore an integral relationship between sacramental worship (liturgy) and Christian life in both its communal and individual facets. What gradually became known as the Liturgical Movement was an assiduous study of early Christian theological and liturgical sources combined with experimentations in ritual reform. Symbolic of the change was the vital recovery of the term 'liturgy' itself (see section 1.3), connoting a dynamic engagement of the assembled faithful and their leadership in the work of divine service done on behalf of and for the benefit of both the church and the wider world. The process would continue into the twentieth century and gain measures of papal endorsement, Roman ritual changes, and ecumenical engagement as in the notable work of the Anglican Benedictine monk Gregory Dix (2005, first published 1945). The movement culminated in Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which became the charter document for full-scale liturgical revisions for both Roman Catholicism and an ecumenical range of other church bodies (see section 1.2).

The theological principle guiding this contemporary restoration and renewal of liturgy is the paschal mystery. The term has profound roots in scripture and the origins of the church. The earliest Christians employed the word 'mystery' in reference not only to the Eucharist and baptism but to all the embodied (personal and communal) ways they experienced God entering into and shaping their lives in Christ. The Greek word *mysterion* (mystery) occurs repeatedly in the New Testament, drawing upon the Jewish biblical tradition wherein God's knowledge is hidden, secret, and beyond comprehension, yet is revealed to the people through the law, the prophets, and – in the late apocalyptic literature such as the books of Daniel and Enoch – as the promise that evil and suffering will be eradicated through the establishment of new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17). The first believers in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God shared the revelatory experience that in him the 'mystery of the kingdom' (Mark 4:11) – the dawn of the final age – had come. The letters of Saint Paul expound on the crucified and risen Christ as the definitive revelation of God's power and wisdom in antithesis to the supposed wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:23–24; 2:6–8). Christ

himself is the fullness of the mystery – is the very mystery of God come to full-bodied revelation – into which the baptized are incorporated (Col 1:17; 2:2; Eph 3:4–5; 5:32; see Gerhards and Kranemann 2017: 194–200). Membership in the church (the body of Christ) bears practical consequences for the baptized. It requires that all recognize one another as parts of Christ's body and together build ethical lives in anticipation of a shared bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15).

Baptism is a share in Christ's death in that the baptized no longer lives under the power of sin but in the hope of the resurrection (Rom 6:1–14). The Eucharist is proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor 11:26), but its truth is only verified though the celebrating community's charity (love) towards one another and their witness in the world (John 13:34–35). It is this sharing – the participation in the very life of Christ through the proclamation of the Word of God and enactment of bodily symbols – that the homilies of ancient bishops as early as Melito of Sardis (d. 180) articulated in terms of paschal mystery (2001). Christ's death and resurrection occurred precisely in the Jewish season of Passover (Hebrew: *pesach*, Greek: *pascha*), hence the paschal character of the mystery of redemption that God has accomplished for humanity in Christ. The early church tradition of perceiving the sacraments as celebrations of the paschal mystery came through two lines of development. The first emphasized participation in the sacraments as participation in Jesus' death and resurrection as the definitive event of salvation. The other emphasized how the sacraments join believers to the work of salvation that Christ's death and resurrection continues to realize both in their individual lives and, through the mission of the church, for the life of the whole world. It is this latter understanding of the paschal mystery that contemporary liturgical theologians continue to advance, as promoted by the influential Orthodox author Alexander Schmemann (d. 1983):

> But I know that in Christ this great Passage, the *Pascha* of the world has begun, that the light of the 'world to come' comes to us in the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit […] And this joy *transforms* all [Christians'] plans and programs, decisions and actions, making all [their] mission the sacrament of the world's return to Him who is the life of the world. (Schmemann 1973: 106, 113)

2.3 Sacraments and sacramentality

The twentieth-century renewal of paschal mystery theology has proven highly consequential for understanding the church's sacramental worship. This focus speaks to the belief that salvation in Christ is not a distant story of the past for human recall and instruction, nor is it narrowly contained in the material objects of priestly consecration, but it is a present experience of the Christ-event playing out in the lives of believers. As full revelation of divine mystery, Christ is the primordial sacrament of God. Ascended bodily

to the right hand of God, he is nonetheless present and active through the power of the Holy Spirit in the corporate body of the church and in each of its members. Sacraments, along with all worship acts of the church, are therefore events of full-bodied engagement in the very life of God. As such, they are revelatory of God's active presence in not only the specific life events of believers, but potentially all dimensions of life. Ongoing participation in the sacramental symbolism of the liturgy likewise reveals the awesome otherness of the God of biblical faith, thereby empowering believers to discern the presence or absence of the divine in concrete human affairs.

In the early twenty-first century, Australian theologian Graham Hughes argued rigorously for a renewed articulation of this sacramentality in contemporary Reformed liturgical tradition (Hughes 2017). Similarly, an earlier French Catholic theologian explained:

> Once we give 'sacrament' its older and broader meaning, we realize that in the Church, the 'universal sacrament of salvation,' everything is somehow sacramental, that is, everything is the vehicle of a meaning and an efficacy belonging to a different order from the realities of direct experience […] (Dalmais 1987: 257)

Christ is the source of life's sacramentality, being both the 'firstborn over all creation' (Col 1:15) and, by his resurrection, the 'firstfruits' of the new creation (1 Cor 15:23). The eschatological nature of paschal faith, of life as a new creation underway yet not yet fully realized, opens participants' awareness to all aspects of the world – natural creation, personal experience, human relations, and history – as bearing potential revelation of God. That is what is meant by sacramentality. Theological understanding of and support for such symbolic interpretation of and engagement with the world requires an adequate comprehension of the multidimensional reality of human embodiment.

3 The person-body: multidimensional sacramental site

The paschal mystery – precisely as celebration of the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ Jesus, and thereby the incarnation – affirms human corporeality as the site of salvation. Here we are reminded of Irenaeus' struggle with the Gnostics who, all too aware of the ambiguities, struggles, and mortal decline of bodily existence, asserted that salvation was an affair of secret knowledge for mind and spirit alone. Orthodox faith, however, is founded on the bodily mission, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and is understood in and through bodily existence, through the shared language and symbols of ritual and worship.

The complexity of human corporeality, as we learn from noted sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet, invites thorough reflection adequate to the concrete realities of Christian existence. Chauvet's body theory is helpful for describing and analyzing worship as the activity of human subjects, communities, and institutions practising the sacramental life of faith in time and space. Drawing on the work of anthropologists Marcel Jousse and Marcel Mauss, and philosophers Martin Heidegger and Stanislas Breton, Chauvet articulates the complex phenomenon of the human person as an 'I-body', a subject whose corporeality is a 'triple body' comprised of culture, tradition, and nature (Chauvet 1995: 146–152). Avoiding rhetoric that might surreptitiously isolate spirit from body, thereby making the latter a mere vehicle for the former, Chauvet wisely refers to the 'person-body' to indicate that each of us does not have a body but, rather, *is* a body – a body that is at once (1) physical, (2) sociocultural, and (3) traditional.

The body is natural in its physicality, in the coordinated functioning of its organs, muscles, and limbs right down to the cellular level and through the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The physicality of the body, itself subject to its own stages of development and decline, is integral to thought processes, intellectual development, and personal reflection. The person-body's physicality interacts with and is affected by rhythms and forces of the cosmos including the shifts in light, temperature, and sound that occur between day and night, the seasonal changes in climate and weather, the lunar cycles and related marine tides, and also the shocks and consequences of storms and cataclysmic weather. While there is a givenness to this participation in the physical universe, the way in which people develop meaning amidst the cosmos comes through the mediation of culture and tradition.

Each human subject, as body, uniquely constructs meaning according to individual desires through a myriad of socially shared symbols. Thus, Chauvet posits, the body is the fundamental functioning symbol, the 'arch-symbol', of human experience (1995: 146–152). The cultural dimension of bodily subjectivity entails the customs, styles, values, symbols, rituals, and artistic forms produced and practised by members of social bodies. At this point in human history, it is a rarity for a society to exist as a single circle wherein family, education, economics, government, the arts, and religion are a simple, integral whole. The modern era has entailed a proliferation of separately functioning yet interacting social institutions and groupings that advances in telecommunication, travel, and globalization have further complexified. Any given person-body lives within multiple, often overlapping social bodies such as family, workplace, school, and church, mosque, or synagogue. Each of these bodies have their own symbolic cultural orders, if not rules, and each of these have varying degrees of impact on or even hegemony over the others. Adding to this complexity is the fact that social groups are constantly changing, whether gradually or abruptly, due to various historical and even environmental forces.

In contrast, the traditional dimension of human corporeality gives authority to seemingly changeless symbols, narratives, rituals, and creedal beliefs connecting people with a more or less mythic past and transcendent dimension of reality. One might characterize the traditional as, ‘thus has it always been, and thus must it be’, whether the ‘it’ be narrative content, behavioural codes, recitation of texts, the functional status of symbols, or the sequencing of ritual. Tradition’s conservative character nonetheless functions in tension with the fact that traditions are always changing, often subtly but also sometimes consciously through the reflective or critical engagement of groups and individuals. Ritual theorist Catherine Bell argues that the effectiveness of traditions depends on their ability to engage ‘collective images of the past’, drawing on the authority of precedent and a perception of consensus. General consensus about a tradition’s authority, nonetheless, always allows for a ‘degree of latent conflict’ that can take the form of ‘mere compliance, quiet evasion, or idiosyncratic rejection’ (Bell 1992: 122–123). Alternatively, contemporary adherents may be well aware of the historical relativity of their tradition’s content even as they willingly allow it to shape particular dimensions of their lives.

In actual lived practice, then, the three bodily dimensions of human existence – natural, cultural, and traditional – do not function independently but, rather, mutually influence each other, with one or the other often taking priority for various person-bodies in the social circles they inhabit.

4 Bodies of worship in time

Of the three bodies, the traditional body takes priority when analyzing the sacramentality of Christian existence as shaped through liturgical worship. While the modern tendency might be to consider a given tradition’s embodied worship in terms of sacred locations and edifices, for Christian ritual it is time that is of the essence (Schmemann 1973: 47–66). Still, while a temporal framework fundamentally governs Christian ritual tradition, understanding the church body at worship also requires steady attention to the physical and sociocultural dimensions of the tradition in practice. In what follows, description and analysis of basic components of how communities broadly celebrate Sunday shall introduce multiple symbolic elements common to liturgical worship. Additional embodied characteristics will unfold in discussion of further calendrical and occasional rituals.

4.1 Sunday: basic unit of time

From early Christian origins, Sunday is the orienting symbol for the church’s liturgical worship. This tradition coincides with the theology of the paschal mystery. The new, unprecedented belief that God had raised the crucified Jesus from the dead emboldened the early believers to take up the prophetic biblical symbol of the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1) as well as the Jewish apocalyptic notion of the Eighth Day as the first day of the New

Creation (2 Enoch) and to transpose and apply them to what God had done in Christ (Lathrop 1993: 36–43). The mid-second-century Roman martyr Justin testifies:

> Sunday, indeed, is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, transforming the darkness and [prime] matter, created the world; and our Savior Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the same day. (*First Apology* 67; Justin Martyr 1975: 107)

Herein lies the heart of Christian eschatology, namely that the biblical expectation of God's establishing a new era (the time of God's reign) has indeed definitively happened, but in a manner humans could not have expected. The risen Christ is the 'firstborn from the dead' (Col 1:18), the first and the last (*ho protos kai ho eschatos*, Rev 1:17), the Lord of creation and history. The baptized, sealed with his Spirit (see 2 Cor 1:22), carry on in their bodies his salvific mission. They participate in the mercy and forgiveness, the justice and peace of God's reign on earth and bear witness to God's favour (grace) for all in Christ until he comes again in glory. Sunday is the original, primary feast day – the day that the diffuse members of Christ's body gather up the work and witness of their lives in a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving while receiving at the table of God's word and sacrament the divine nourishment that sustains them on the journey towards the kingdom's final coming.

4.1.1 The gathering of the assembly

The Sunday assembly of the faithful manifests the church to one another and to the world. Indeed, the Greek word for church (*ekklesia)* means 'a called assembly'. The Jewish first believers in Christ Jesus had adopted the Septuagint's Greek translation of the Hebrew word for the assembly of God's people (*qahal*). The church assembly constitutes the fundamental symbol of the risen Christ. The gathering is itself a sacramental act of worship since believers' coming together is a tangible encounter with Christ's active presence: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (Matt 18:20). In their ritual worship, the assembled members of the church brings their service to God on behalf of not only themselves but all peoples, even all creation. In the late first-century book of Revelation, the seer John receives his apocalyptic visions for the church precisely on the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10), thereby revealing how the church's worship joins with 'every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea' in singing the praises of 'the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb' (Rev 5:13). Whatever trials earthly believers may be undergoing in their social bodies, their lives are nonetheless joined with those imperceptible person-bodies already gathered at the heavenly 'marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev 19:9).

As a practical matter, one of the most effective ways to physically bond an assembly of people is music and song. Not surprisingly, then, the activity that generally initiates

Christian services of worship across a wide range of ecclesial-cultural traditions and locations is vocalized music, whether instrumentally accompanied or not. Leaving aside consideration of the textual content of hymnody or song, the effect of music on individual and assembled bodies is fundamentally a result of a physiological process combining breath with the production and sensing of vibrations as sound. Biomedical research (Wilson and Weeks 1991a; 1991b) suggests that the interaction between auditory vibrations in the eardrum and parasympathetic nerves throughout the body results in the control and regulation of numerous major organs of the body. Concurrence on the cellular level between the ear and the rest of the body is proving crucial for understanding how the brain both becomes stimulated and regulates bodily behaviour, with the vestibular system being crucial to erect bodily posture. A person's body and mind process both self-produced and outside vibrations as sounds, such that even a deaf person can experience and produce music due to processes at the cellular level in their bones, skin, and organs. In what sound researchers call musical entrainment, the entire body engages in the activity of listening and self-listening. The body's breath and heartbeat synchronize with the pace, rhythm, and pulse of the vibrations in the music while the ear 'translates' these pulsations to the brain, thus affecting one's consciousness (Goldman 1992: 14–15).

Applying this sketch of the biophysiological research, then, to the custom of opening worship services with music: the performance of song 'charges' participants' bodies and minds, heightening awareness and orienting person-bodies both horizontally and vertically (that is, in relation to selves, others, and God; Wilson and Weeks 1991a: 17). The typical posture is standing, which traditional commentaries on Christian worship explain sociologically as symbolizing respectful attentiveness. The theological symbolism of the posture includes paschal joy (the risen body), dignity as members in Christ, and eschatological watchfulness for Christ's return. Engagement as a traditional body is only possible due to the participation of all. The collective processes of movement, posture, sound production, and reception contribute to the individual person-body's 'heightened' mental and spiritual sense of being in the presence of God. The corporate musical engagement likewise serves the traditional conception of the assembly as mutual members of the body of Christ. The rhythm, melody, tones, and overtones of the music generate a certain bodily synchrony among the participants through a shared range of entrainment of breath, heartbeat, and movement. Exemplary of the corporate integration of music, breath, and body in worship are the practices of swaying and dance common in African and African diaspora churches (Costen 2007: 19, 36, 41–42, 59). For these reasons, once an assembly is of a sizeable number, music is the key to unifying the participants. Participation is therefore not only a matter of divine service and self-edification, but also of mutual service to fellow participants. It serves to renew the strength of Christ's body – the members of the church with and for one another.

This is but one angle on the worshipping body, a natural perspective. Music, sound, and silence function throughout, yet do so variably for each person-body, with sociocultural dimensions inevitably coming into play. Of vital importance over the past few decades has been the burgeoning pastoral awareness of, engagement with, and scholarship concerning ecclesial members with a wide range of differing abilities of mind and body. For example, practical theologian Armand Léon van Ommen and colleagues have published studies integrating neuroscientific, educational, and music theories with qualitative congregational research among autistic members. Their findings highlight how music (performance and reception, volume levels and silence) variably impacts the thoughts and feelings of autistic 'selves' (that is, person-bodies) in different ways than they do non-autistic people (van Ommen and Strong 2022: 336–356; van Ommen and Unwin 2022: 267–288). Greater recognition of how music functions in the spirituality of autistic individuals is yielding not only appreciation for but also promotion of the ways in which those members can and do enhance the communal body at worship.

This positive recognition of autistic members in community is representative of the broader field of disability studies in ecclesiology, worship, and liberative justice for which sociologist-theologian Nancy Eisland's work in the first half of the 1990s proved seminal (Eisland 1994; see also Eisland and Saliers 1998). Pastoral experience with fellow disabled Christians led Eisland to a transformative awareness of the body of the risen Christ as a disabled body (in hands, feet, and torso). The eucharistic celebration of word and sacrament comprises for *all* the assembled an encounter with the disabled God in Christ. Participation in the conceptional and nonverbal symbolism of the liturgical action fosters an imagination of wholeness (differentially conceived and communally shared) and inspires ongoing work for embodied social justice. Eisland's grounding of her liberative theology in the Eucharist accordingly points to two further major elements of Sunday worship common across liturgical traditions: the service of the Word and the service of the table.

4.1.2 The service of the Word

Following upon the music-driven gathering ritual that initiates a Sunday service is the service of the Word. The church assembly, under the leadership of its ministers, disposes itself to the word of God through an ordered pattern of proclamation and response. The word of God that the church proclaims in its liturgy is – for reasons both human and divine – something far greater than words on the pages of a book. Humanly speaking, the various types of literature comprising the Christian Bible have the potential to shape imaginations, instill hope or fear, convey knowledge and wisdom, and inform intellects and consciences in the ways that all good stories, poetry, and prose do. Furthermore, the contexts in which texts are encountered affect their impact, such that solitary reading or silent study comprises a different experience than public performance or group recitation.

Reading or hearing a text is always an event for those involved, for it draws people into an encounter with symbols – words evoking images and ideas – that interact with, create, reinforce, or transform a world of meaning for those engaged. The sharing of words, whether written or oral, comprises a crucial medium for relationships between persons.

Biblical faith reveals the encounter between God and people as coming about precisely through the creative, symbolic medium of words. Indeed, the Hebrew experience of being in relationship with the Lord God was such that the concept of 'word' itself became a primary symbol for how the totally other, immaterial divinity reaches out to humans, creating and sustaining them. The Jewish scriptures portray God's mighty deeds and God's word as one and the same encapsulated in the word *dabar* – an energizing word, a dynamic driving force, a creative power directed towards fulfilling its promise (Hilkert 1998: 61). While ancient Judaism used many metaphors to express God's interaction with people (angel, hand, arm, finger, wisdom, etc.), the prophetic literature favoured language such as 'the word of the Lord' and 'God's spirit' (the Hebrew word *ruach* literally meaning breath). This genre found these speech-related expressions to be particularly apt for describing the way in which God is ineffably different from all creation, yet is intimately engaged in the lives of creatures, especially the affairs of humans and the courses of their histories.

The synchrony of word and breath (spirit) together propelling speech served a key role in the first believers' articulation of what God had revealed and accomplished in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Drawing on the metaphors of the Hebrew prophets and wisdom literature, the gospels reveal him as the Word made flesh (incarnate) through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' brief public mission was in the genre of the classical Jewish prophets. Uniquely possessed by the Spirit (as revealed at his baptism in the Jordan River), Jesus' words and other symbolic actions were those of God – in his very speaking and doing, God's will was enacted. Jesus' ultimate self-gift in obedience to God's will and love for humanity came in the seeming disaster of his death and the marvel of his resurrection, the paschal mystery that gave his disciples a radically new perspective on all they had experienced with him.

From that climactic point, the only Jesus to be encountered was the Risen Lord, the full revelation of his identity shedding light back on all he had said and done. Those words and deeds, henceforth remembered and shared by the gathered community, reveal the nature of God's love and will for humanity (i.e. the reign of God). If followers of Jesus desire to know him – that is, to encounter his person and share in his presence – then they must continuously hear anew the accounts of his deeds and relationships with crowds and individuals, and the contents of his parables, proverbs, and other sayings. Biblical scholars widely agree that every gospel narrative was written to reflect the entire scope of the word of God in the Old Testament, the Jewish Scriptures. The gospels express this through descriptions of Jesus fulfilling the law and the prophets (see Matt 5:17; Luke 24:27) and

being the very word of God come to dwell with humans, full of grace and truth (see John 1:14). Jesus' self-offering in death and vindication in the Spirit reveal his entire life to be the ultimate communion of God with humanity, humanity with God.

The primary point to be taken from this summary of the content and nature of biblical revelation is that – as the word of God – it is an original event of God that communicates in a particular time and place through and amidst particular person-bodies. The church assembled in worship proclaims and responds to the biblical body of tradition that consistently reveals that God's creative and redemptive will is for both the individual and the whole – a social body of shared commitment and mutual care. Being in the company of others cannot but affect how individuals discern the word of God. Here too, burgeoning awareness of the full range of person-bodies is proving important. While some members may have limitations of mind and body that minimize engagement with the cognitive content of the service, gesture, touch, and silence offer equally valuable means of participation in both the service of the Word and the entire liturgy (Spurrier 2019). In any case, engaging the biblical word of God as an assembled body enacts the event-character of revelation.

While sound, in the sense of adequate voice projection – or sight, in the case of printed or projected text for the deaf and those who find visual materials more accessible – may most readily appear as pertinent to the effective embodiment of the proclamation of the Word, silence and breath prove equally crucial. In a metaphorical sense, the entire service of the Word needs periodic brief silences in order to breathe. Put another way, bodily silence is needed for a person to form their intention and attentiveness. Likewise, silence provides the opportunity, following a reading's proclamation, to reflect upon or even 'hear' a word from the Spirit. Just as silence – especially in the stillness as a breath's inhale transitions into its exhale – is essential to musical performance, so is it to the proclamation of the biblical text. As it does in music, silence offers pauses that frame and pace the reading, moments of intentional stillness elicited from deep engagement of its content. Indeed, careful, studied preparation of the text affords the possibility of the reader finding an original, even unexpected intonation, pace, or arresting silence arising in the moment of proclamation itself. These characteristics of the ritually performed Word contribute to the service becoming an impactful experience in body, mind, and spirit – in theological terms, an event of revelation.

In addition to the bodily dimensions of sound and silence, the event-character of the service of the Word is likewise built up (albeit variably among church traditions) through the other senses of sight, smell, and touch. One notable tradition concerning bodily posture across Catholic and Orthodox liturgies, as well as many Protestant services of the Word, is for all who are able to stand for the proclamation of the gospel reading. Standing for the gospel is a sign of singular respect for Christ as the full revelation of the divine

Word. Generally, churches position the proclamation of the biblical readings and the homily (liturgical sermon) in the elevated part of the sanctuary that, except in Orthodox churches, includes a stationary pulpit. For the proclamation of the gospel, Anglican and Orthodox traditions include a procession of the ministers with the gospel book held high (symbolizing its authority) and flanked by lighted candles into the middle of the assembly (symbolizing Christ's mission among the people). Contemporary Roman Catholic ritual may include a similar procession of the gospel book from the altar table on which it was placed at the start of the liturgy to the pulpit, symbolizing the unity of Word and sacrament, the one Christ present and active in both.

In all these traditions, the gospel procession is a visual announcement accompanied by a chanted acclamation of honour and praise with the vibrational synchrony and harmonic sound of the music, as ever, unifying the people as one body. Touch likewise comes into play across the range of Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox traditions. As the gospel reading is introduced, the proclaiming minister (a priest or deacon) as well as many members of the congregation make the sign of the cross on their foreheads, lips, and chests. Similarly, upon completing the reading, the minister kisses the open book. As for the sense of smell (as well as sight), in Orthodox services fragrant incense is wafted towards the book, an ancient gesture of veneration likewise practised in more solemn services of the Word in Catholic and Anglican churches.

Christian churches have always existed amidst wider societies such that their decisions regarding types of music, styles of ministerial vestments, the design and use of liturgical objects, and the arrangement of the worship space have always been influenced by their sociohistorical contexts – the interaction of the cultural body and traditional body. Contemporary worldwide Christianity has seen increased confrontation with churches' colonialist histories and the related imposition of Euro-uniformity on local ethnic bodies. This has required new degrees of enculturation, at times radical (in the true sense of the term), in all aspects of a given church's liturgy: its symbols, music, and gestures, as well as its narrative, and textual content.

Although many people in our modern context might, at first thought, consider words and texts to be related only to mind (and perhaps spirit), this brief examination of the Sunday service of the Word challenges that notion. It discloses how an assembled people's tradition for proclaiming and responding to passages of scripture – through reading, music, preaching, silence, and movement – engages persons in particular physical ways, producing or reinforcing them as members of that social body called church. For numerous church communities in the lineage of the Protestant Reformation, the service of the Word usually or even always comprises the entire Sunday ritual. On the other hand, for Orthodox, Catholic, many Anglican, and some Lutheran churches, the Sunday liturgy always continues with the service of the table.

4.1.3 The service of the table

A human commonality across cultures and epochs is the sharing of gifts as a symbolic means of bonding persons as social bodies. The gift of food and drink in the form of a shared meal (or, in some cultures, a ceremonially shared beverage) is one of the most impactful expressions of this tradition. The act of eating and drinking from one table or bowl has a bodily impact on the participants to which symbolic meaning is added through the recitation of shared stories, prayers, songs, and traditional gestures. Such is true for Christianity from its very origins, as Luke portrays the common life undertaken by the several thousand converts baptized at Pentecost: 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers […] they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God' (Acts 2:42, 46). Over the first generations of the early church, as the size of communities grew, the gathering place for the Sunday celebration would be the large social-dining space of a wealthier member. This meal gathering was typical for a social group in the late antique Mediterranean world, whether the Graeco-Roman symposium or the Jewish weekly sabbath or annual Passover supper. The Jews celebrated such meals as a form of sacrifice called a peace offering whereby they bonded anew with God and with one another. The synoptic gospels recount how, on the eve of his execution, Jesus shared the Passover supper with his disciples. By adding to the traditional table blessing with bread and wine his identification of them as his body and blood, Jesus established the meal symbolism of a new divine-human covenant through him (Matt 26:17–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:7–20). These accounts became the foundational story and ritual rudiments for the Sunday, Lord's Day meal.

Justin Martyr (d. 165) provides the earliest detailed description of the Sunday ritual: (1) the people assembling 'in one place', (2) the readings from the apostles and prophets, (3) the presiding minister's homiletic discourse on them, (4) the standing and offering up of prayers, (5) the kiss of peace, (6) the bringing forth of bread and wine over which the president offers prayers and thanks, (7) the subsequent sharing in them by all, (8) the people's financial and material gifts for distribution to any in need (widows, orphans, the sick, migrants, prisoners). Justin explains how the church calls the offered bread and wine *eucharistía* (thanksgiving), the sharing of which is restricted to the baptized:

> Not as ordinary bread or as ordinary drink do we partake of them; but just as, through the word of God, our Savior Jesus Christ became Incarnate and took upon Himself flesh and blood for our salvation, so we have been taught, the food which has been made the Eucharist by the prayer of His word, and which nourishes our flesh and blood by

> assimilation, is both the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. (*First Apology* 66; Justin Martyr 1975: 105–106)

He then summarizes the gospel narratives' descriptions of Jesus' words and actions over the bread and wine, highlighting them as the ritual remembrance (*anamnesis*) of Christ. To this day, Justin's account remains foundational for the basic sequence and theological understanding of the entire Sunday service, most notably the Eucharist and the concurrent gift-giving for the material needs of the poor.

Justin's account portrays the physical, cultural, and traditional dimensions of the Christian body at Sunday worship, all of which form the affective desires, growth in virtues, and ethical obligations of each person-body. Notable for the ensuing tradition is his detailed highlighting of the eucharistic elements as both transformed into Christ's body and blood but also sacramentally and ethically transformational of those who partake of them. One further early church source – the fourth-century catechetical homilies attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) – dramatically demonstrates the holistic, sacramental, and ethical power of the bodily partaking of the Eucharist:

> After this you hear the Cantor inviting you in sacred song to participate in the holy mysteries. His words are: *Taste, and see that the Lord is good*. […] So when you come forward, do not come with arm extended or fingers parted. Make your left hand a throne for the right, since your right hand is about to welcome a King. Cup your palm and receive in it Christ's body, saying in response *Amen*. Then carefully bless your eyes with a touch of the holy body, and consume it, being careful to drop not a particle of it. […] After partaking of Christ's body, go to receive the chalice of his blood. […] While your lips are still moist with his blood, touch it with your hands and bless your eyes, forehead, and other organs of sense. (1994)

By the late fourth century, the sociopolitical acceptance and growth of Christianity required that the Sunday liturgy be shifted from the more intimate setting of house or banquet room to basilicas, the large structure that was standard for public assemblies. The chanting of Psalm 34 ('Taste and see') during the congregation's procession to the front sanctuary area for the Eucharist is not only thematically relevant (tasting and seeing) but also, as discussed above, it offers an experience of corporate bonding due to the sound vibrations of the music effecting a degree of unity among the person-bodies amidst the cavernous space.

Belief that the divine power is present in the bread and wine finds ritual performance through acts of veneration. These acts form an embodied tradition that is practised in various manners (bowing, kneeling, crossing oneself, kissing one's fingers) across

churches and throughout the centuries. Cyril's gestures of veneration (making a throne of one's hands and then touching the bread and wine to parts of the body) are particularly elaborate and theologically rich. People in the late antique Mediterranean world understood the performance of human agency to originate not merely from the mind and spirit, but rather from the three zones of bodily organs: *heart-eyes* for emotion-infused thought, *mouth-ears* for self-expressive speech, and *hands-feet* for purposeful action (Malina 2001: 68–71, 120–123). The communicant's gestures, then, serve both to venerate the sacred elements and to sanctify the ethical life, virtuous words, and God-glorifying deeds of the person-body.

Nonetheless, the traditional body at Holy Communion is not an autonomous individual person-body (per the modern bias), but also essentially a social body, the body of the church comprised of its members. Other symbols that remain traditional in the eucharistic rite enable active expression of the unity in love (charity) that the community is called to have as one in the Spirit, one in Christ. The recitation or chanting of the Lord's Prayer (Our Father) occurs during the eucharistic rite precisely because of its petition, 'forgive us our trespasses (sins), as we forgive those who have trespassed (sinned) against us'. Unity among the members of Christ's body is likewise expressed in the kiss of peace (embraces exchanged among the assembled). Both symbols contribute to the momentum towards Holy Communion as a *shared* reception of grace (divine favour and power). Thus did Augustine (d. 430) and, following him, Aquinas (d. 1274) teach that the full reality and ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is greater charity among the body of Christ, the church. This liturgy, constantly repeated, exemplifies the principle that it is the entire practical life of faith that is the worship of God.

4.2 Calendrical time: fasting and feasting, drama and devotion

4.2.1 The day

From the start, Sunday has anchored time for Christians due to its being the day on which the gospels recount the crucified Christ was raised from the dead. It is important to note that the gospels introduce the event as occurring on the first day of the week according to the Jewish calendar. As it developed, Christian daily prayer likewise drew influence from the psalms, songs, readings, and prayers commonly practised by Jews in the morning, afternoon, and evening. However, whereas many Jews practised fast days on Tuesday and Thursday in preparation for the Sabbath's start at Friday sundown, early Christians shifted their 'station' days to Wednesday and Friday, with the Lord's Day commencing at sundown on Saturday. Wednesday and Friday were given over to fasting up to the ninth hour (3pm), a tradition that continued for centuries. Prayer on those days gradually expanded from an individual to a communal practice, eventually including eucharistic celebration in some regions (see Christian Year).

4.2.2 The week

Fasting was the most notable embodied practice observed on the two stational days and thus within the rhythm of the week. Physically, fasting entails restricting one's bodily consumption of food and drink (and possibly other activities as well), thereby affecting the faster's metabolism, their energy level, and, consequently, their awareness and thought. A practice found widely across cultures, fasting entails self-denial, effort, and sacrifice in relation to some greater good. In many cultural (religious) bodies fasting is performed with the intention of deepening or restoring people's relationship with the divine. From its origins to the present, the Christian tradition has considered fasting to have a Christological orientation. The practice represents an edifying devotion to Jesus for what he freely endured, unto death, in love for God and humanity, 'his own […] to the end' (John 13:1). As Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann often emphasized, the physical deprivation and yearning entailed in fasting enhances the anticipation for and enjoyment of the ensuing feasting, whether it be the weekly Sunday Eucharist or the special feast days that gradually came to comprise the liturgical year (Schmemann 1973: 51–55).

4.2.3 The year

By the late second century, an annual Resurrection celebration began to spread. In 325, the Council of Nicaea established Easter Sunday's annual occurrence in relation to the cosmic springtime lunar timing of the traditional Jewish Passover (*pesach*) – the festival during which Jesus died and arose. The Friday fast before Easter Sunday came to be observed through Saturday as well, then the preparatory period expanded to encompass the prior Sunday, constituting a solemn Holy Week. Lent gradually developed as a forty-day season of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving in penitential preparation for the Easter feast, while Eastertide itself had lengthened much earlier to be fifty days, ending on Pentecost Sunday. Christianity adapted Pentecost (the Jewish festival celebrating the Sinai covenant) to have a new meaning based on Luke's account of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ's disciples during Pentecost (Acts 2:1–41). Fourth-century bishops exhorted observance of the entire Easter season as an octave of (eight) Sundays or a 'week of weeks' (forty-nine days plus one). Basil of Caesarea (d. 379) – who theologized Pentecost as a remembrance (*anamnesis*) of the resurrection awaiting all the baptized in the promised new creation – prohibited fasting and kneeling throughout the season since those bodily practices were inappropriate for Sunday and, thus, to the annual weekslong Sunday.

Over the centuries, embodiment in worship throughout the entire ninety-day Easter Cycle has come to involve not only deprivation (Lenten fasting) and indulgence (Easter feasting), but also a range of traditional practices integrating the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of Christian sacramentality. In central and western Europe, by the High Middle Ages the liturgies of Holy Week and Easter had become all but exclusive

rituals of the clergy and so the laity took increasing roles in processions and dramatic performances. Processions became the form of ritual activity that provided lay people with a role in the corporate liturgical drama of Holy Week, offering the opportunity to join behind the clergy within church rites and also in popular street processions. In every region, the Mass for Palm Sunday included a procession with clergy and laity often carrying blessed palms and flowers from an outlying chapel to the central church or cathedral. Central European families would carry the palms in musical procession through their farms, sticking branches in fields and barns for protection from storm and pestilence.

From the evening of Maundy Thursday into Friday morning, Southwest Europeans would dress in black and visit temporary shrines of the reserved Blessed Sacrament in seven churches or chapels, praying the rosary along their way. This tradition continues today there and in places around the globe where Portuguese and Spanish peoples settled. On the Iberian Peninsula, there developed Good Friday street processions in which men wearing hooded cowls and carrying candles depicted the events of the passion – a tradition that evolved into role-playing all the *dramatis personae* (main characters) in the gospel accounts. These costumed performances have continued in ever-evolving enculturated ways across the globe in lands once colonized by the Portuguese and Spanish. For example, such places as the Philippines and the U.S. Southwest have evolved Good Friday practices whereby men devotionally torture their bodies in mimetic union with the suffering Christ (Bautista 2019; Mellott 2009: 41–66). In medieval Germanic countries, a different type of devotional dramatization took the form of staged Passion and Easter plays with numerous costumed male and female actors. To this day, the people of Oberammergau, Germany produce an elaborate passion play every ten years.

Description of regional and ethnic Easter food and meal traditions across global Christianity would exceed the scope of this article, as would acknowledgement of the integration of all the bodily senses in the proliferation of enculturated traditions of food, drink, clothing, site location, decoration, and much more that exist around the world (Morrill 2006: 112–134). Likewise, space limitations prohibit description of similar processional, dramatic, and culinary traditions throughout the year, such as in the other major seasonal cycle of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany. The present review of the Easter cycle may serve as a guide to such types of historical and contemporary practices for further study.

4.3 Times in the life-cycle: person-bodies, ecclesial bodies

The regular cycles of day, week, and year shape the life of the church in the world, its ongoing history towards the eschatological coming of Christ, and its final transformation into ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev 21:1; see also 2 Pet 3:13). Still, the church is comprised of individual person-bodies, each with their own life-cycle and variable abilities. This necessitates the use of Christian symbols and rituals for marking transitions related

to maturation, to status within the church and society, and to the health of body and soul. These occasional rites benefit both the individual and the social-traditional body of the ecclesial community. Just as the symbolism in the rituals of the church calendar engages the full range of physical senses to enable individual participation and communal cohesion, life-cycle rites feature symbolic materials and gestures that are traditional yet conditioned by sociocultural contexts. The purpose of these rites is to allow individuals to participate more deeply in the paschal mystery – to interpret their lives as companionship with Christ Jesus (with his life and his death) through the life-creating and restoring power of his Spirit.

The New Testament portrays baptism by water and the Holy Spirit as initiating the believer's new life, and the Eucharist as offering the ongoing sustenance of that life (Acts 8:36–39; 10:44–48; 1 Cor 11:23–26). These the church identified early on as mysteries and eventually (in the Latin-speaking lands of North Africa and Europe) as sacraments. Rituals for the healing of mind, body, and soul developed quickly, while healing rites of penance and reconciliation for those whose sin had wounded communion with God and the ecclesial body came about more gradually. Rites for ordination to permanent offices of leadership in the church – beginning with bishops (*episkopoi*) and deacons (*diaconoi*) – evolved relatively early as well, whereas only much more gradually did the vocation of married life realize a degree of sacramental stature and evolution in ritual (Reynolds 2016). The medieval Latin church (with parallels in the Eastern Orthodox church) settled on identifying a total of seven formal sacraments: (1) baptism, (2) confirmation/chrismation, (3) Eucharist, (4) penance, (5) anointing of the sick, (6) holy orders, and (7) marriage. The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers, however, restricted the category of sacrament to those rituals Christ explicitly commanded in scripture: baptism and the Lord's supper. Here follows a brief treatment of just a few of the most notable types of symbolism engaging the bodily senses that are operative among the seven liturgical sacraments.

Anointing with oil is a gesture of smooth liquid permeating the surface of the body, making it an appropriate marker of the transformation of a person's life condition or even permanent life status. New Testament texts describe both Jesus and believers as being anointed with the Spirit and/or power (Acts 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21; Heb 1:9; 1 John 2:20). These accounts influenced the development of traditional rites of Christian initiation, including the anointing of catechumens in preparation for water baptism and a post-baptismal anointing with chrism. The anointing with chrism constituted the infusion of the Spirit of Christ upon the neophyte, now a full member of the body of Christ. Using olive oil infused with aromatic spices proper to each stage of initiation, these anointings engaged not only the sense of touch but also of smell. In churches that teach ordination to the priesthood as affecting an ontological change in the person, the ritual includes anointing of the hands, consecrating them to the ministry of the sacraments. In certain churches, such as the Roman Catholic, the ordination of a bishop includes an anointing of the head (Wood

2000: 30, 52, 89, 106). Such an anointing is but one among several symbolic gestures engaged during the ordination rites.

From the start of Christianity, the medicinal function of olive oil made its prayerful application a symbol of healing for the sick. As churches grew in size, bishops regularly consecrated oil for the sick during the Sunday eucharistic liturgy for people to take home and self-apply or even drink. However, by the medieval period the ritual of applying oil to a sick or dying person-body became the exclusive function of the ordained (a priest or bishop). Today, across a broad ecumenical spectrum, a biblically and anthropologically renewed theology and pastoral ministry of anointing the sick offers holistic strengthening for the seriously ill person (Boulton 2007; Morrill 2007a; Schattauer 2007; Smith 2007). Readings and prayers used during these anointings draw heavily from gospel narratives of Jesus' healing encounters with the sick and outcast. The presence of the church represented by the minister as well as by loved ones and caregivers fosters assurance of Christ's loving accompaniment of the anointed person in their health crisis or advancing decline due to old age.

The sense of touch functions in various other symbolic gestures among the formal sacraments. As noted earlier, the eucharistic rite's kiss of peace expresses mutual affection through embrace or handshake. The current liturgy for Maundy Thursday in Catholic and many Protestant churches includes a ceremonial washing of members' feet done in obedient imitation of Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:1–17). Mennonite traditions (on principle of strict biblical adherence) perform foot washing during each of the few occasions per year that they celebrate Holy Communion. In addition to the multivalent sensation of water and drying by towel, the ritual entails the washer's bending and kneeling – a visual symbol of humble, caring service. Another common gesture of touch is the laying on of hands. For rites of penance and the anointing of the sick this serves as a healing gesture, whereas in rites of confirmation and ordination it symbolizes status conferral and empowerment for mission.

5 Bodies of worship in space

5.1 Form serving function, art serving theology

Just as people often associate the word 'church' with the Christian Sunday service, so also the word can readily bring to mind the building where the assembly worships. As noted above, the typical place for gathering during the first three centuries was the house. The earliest house church that archeologists have discovered dates to the mid-third century in Dura-Europos, Syria. It features a large space for worship plus a small room containing a bath or font for baptismal immersion with walls covered in painted scenes from the gospels and a depiction of Christ as the Good Shepherd. With the fourth-century imperial sanctioning of Christianity, the basilica became the edifice capable of holding the swelling

numbers of worshippers along with the equipment and vesture of imperial court ritual. These included thuribles, chalices, fans, and candle sticks used in the apse, which also contained the bema, the altar table, and the chair for the presiding minister (bishop). The cultural body found further expression in floors, walls, and ceilings covered in mosaics depicting male and female worshippers dressed in period finery as well as any number of allegorical symbols and biblical figures and scenes. Baptistries, likewise decorated, were separate chambers or free-standing structures containing pools for full-body immersion. These were designed and artistically decorated to embody the theological themes of the sacramental mystery: rebirth by water and the Spirit, dying and rising in Christ, and new creation (John 3:3–6; Rom 6:4–11; 2 Cor 5:17).

The structures and art of Christian worship spaces have developed in continuous relationship with the historical evolution of ritual forms. These forms are shaped by the interaction of theological beliefs and customs, geographic conditions, and the aesthetic and power dynamics of a social context (Ramshaw 2009). While two millennia of ecclesial art and architecture exceed the scope of this article, a short description of the key characteristics of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant spaces can sketch how the physical, sociocultural, and traditional dimensions of human embodiment are constantly at play in Christian worship settings.

5.2 Orthodox churches

The Orthodox worship space – whether on a metropolitan or a village scale – has a basic horizontal floorplan and vertical design features that create an interior symbolic of the joining of earth and heaven. This form accords with the eucharistic theology of the Divine Liturgy that envisions an ascent into the mystery of the heavenly marriage banquet of the Lamb in the great company of saints (Rev 19:1–9). The assembly space allows for free movement while a wall of icons (the iconostasis) separates it from the apse-like inner sanctuary with its altar and curved (often domed) ceiling. The predominant artform is the icons covering the walls, the iconostasis, and the ceiling. The figure of Christ as Lord of all creation dominates the ceiling (making the interior symbolic of the cosmos) while figures of saints and angels spread out and around. An ordered series of key saintly figures on the iconostasis stand between the assembled people and the altar, symbolizing the communion of the visible and invisible members of the entire people of God. The people light and place candles in stands in front of the iconostasis and prominent icons in the wider assembly space. Individuals have the freedom to choose at what point during the stages of the lengthy liturgy they will physically perform their spiritual devotions and prayerful intentions. Standing is the posture of all who are physically able throughout the liturgy. Similarly, each person-body making the sign of the cross from forehead to breast to shoulders at each blessing of the Divine Trinity is a constant throughout the service. Although regional and cultural variations exist, the clerical vesture, musical chanting,

profuse use of incense, and array of ceremonial equipment all have Byzantine roots. The differentiated activities of the various Orthodox liturgical roles (the ordained, the cantor, the choir, and the assembly) embody a present atmosphere of divine-human communion.

5.3 Roman Catholic churches

Much greater cultural variations in art and architecture characterize Catholic worship spaces around the globe even as certain features and fixtures – such as the sanctuary's fixed altar table, pulpit, and chair for the presiding celebrant – are mandatory. The legacy of the medieval Western European eucharistic theology (which centres on the real presence of Christ in the sacramental eucharistic host) has governed historical and regional variations in Catholic interior design for nearly a millennium. While churches and cathedrals coming into the Middle Ages had long fixed their altars against the eastern wall of the building (the eschatological horizon of Christ's return), the narrowed identification of the body of Christ with the consecrated host led to the addition of a tabernacle reserving some of the sacramental bread being centred prominently atop the altar. Over the tabernacle, a freestanding or wall-mounted crucifix (a cross with a figure of the dying Jesus) identified the Blessed Sacrament with Christ's sacrificial death. As for the overall architectural design, the cruciform Gothic floorplan widely gave way from the late sixteenth century to a more linear baroque design focused on the altar's tabernacle and crucifix. This shift was in part a reaction to Protestant rejections of the Medieval Mass and the reserved Blessed Sacrament. Within this setting, the priest and attending clergy and acolytes offered the sacrifice of the Mass with their backs to the people. Meanwhile, the congregation prayed devotionally and listened for bells to signal the moment when the priest elevated overhead the consecrated host and chalice before bowing in adoration on their knees. Church interiors could have any number of statues of saints to inspire individuals' silent devotions, while stained glass windows presented narratives of biblical events and the lives of the saints.

Vatican II (1962–1965) set in motion a radical restoration and renewal of the Mass and all other sacramental rites. The aim was to recover (1) the liturgical identity and role of the assembled laity, (2) a robust service of the proclaimed word of God, and (3) a service of the Eucharist as an all-involving sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, and communion. Adaptations to existing church interiors and even original designs for new buildings have necessarily followed from the theological reform. The most symbolically impactful feature of these adaptations is the free-standing altar table that faces the assembly. In the early period of this liturgical renewal, church designs situated the tabernacle in a side chapel or niche so as not to detract from the distinct sacramental event of each liturgical celebration – the people gathered before or around the altar and the priest in prayerful communion. In the past two decades, however, hierarchical leadership has returned to a nearly exclusive emphasis on the sacred object of the Blessed Sacrament – and with it, the exclusive

sacral identity of the priest. Therefore, the tabernacle in most churches once again figures prominently at the centre of the altar space. The post-Vatican II simplification of the overall interior space (aiming to focus attention on the assembled body, on the proclaimed Word, and on the altar table) entailed limiting the amount of statuary and other symbols. However, in certain regions and amongst certain ethnic groups statuary and other visual art forms remain extensive.

5.4 Protestant churches

Fundamental to the full range of Protestant reform movements across Europe was a rejection of the medieval theology of the Roman Mass (Eucharist) and the related ideologies of the priesthood and the sacraments that they performed. The prioritization of the biblical word of God as read, preached, and responded to in congregational prayer could not but have a profound effect on the design and decoration (or lack thereof) of the worship space. Emphasis on the priesthood of all the assembled baptized correlated with removal of most artistic objects of individual devotion. Instead, congregational song and choral performance came to the fore, constituting the people's corporate devotion in worship. Generally, the dominant feature of the Protestant sanctuary is the pulpit along with the pipe organ and choir configuration. The modest wooden altar table may stand either below the pulpit or to one side, with the biblical warrant for the sacrament, 'Do this in remembrance of me', often carved across the front. White walls, clear glass windows, and pews with racks for holding hymnals, Bibles, and communion glasses serve to support worship as an activity of a united people.

Conditions in the wider social body that have enabled Protestant traditions include affordable print media as well as literacy and music education. Modern technology's innovations in structural design as well as sound and video equipment (along with varying cultural styles of music and oration) are among the other societal influences that have more recently contributed to the reconfiguration of embodiment in Protestant worship (see Theology and Technology). Rapidly emerging is the blending of cyber and physical space, enabling not only remote viewing but also remote interaction with a live service (Han 2017). Evangelical churches have long exploited audio and visual technology to free up bodies for hand clapping, arm raising, and (depending on ethnocultural embodiment) dancing. At the other end of the ritual spectrum are 'high church' Anglican and Lutheran spaces whose interiors, depending on their geographic and cultural locations, may resemble late medieval or post-Vatican II design and decoration.

6 Conclusion: contemporary change and challenges

As a full-bodied activity, Christian worship cannot but undergo change and face new challenges as the physical, sociocultural, and traditional conditions where it is practised evolve. Much of this work has required churches to correlate scripture and tradition with

new evidence based on history, testimony, and physical and social science. Ongoing strides in ecumenical interrelations have both benefited from and contributed to the ways in which denominations understand and adapt the practices of their respective liturgical traditions.

Contemporary social and cultural factors, nonetheless, pose challenges to worship traditions – some with increasing difficulty, if not urgency. The combined forces of consumerism, a pervasive entertainment industry, and personal-use technology have all contributed to decreased engagement with traditional communal rhythms of time and their related ritual activities. In concert with such factors, neoliberal valorization of the autonomous individual has contributed to widespread disaffection with religious rituals which, however much traditions may incrementally morph, require participants to willingly join in established patterns of symbolic action. Emerging theological scholarship, rather than pitting liturgy against these social forces, seeks a constructive engagement with technology's undeniable pervasiveness (Doyle 2021). Similarly, such studies recognize new possibilities for the creative integration of Christian symbols and rituals with the individual's participation in commercial society (Alonso 2022). These and other challenges afford new opportunities for communities to engage in historical study, cultural retrieval, mutual learning, and reflective practice.

Attributions

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