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Liturgy and Dogmatics

Kurt E. Marquart

The purpose of this article is to unpack the tangle of issues hidden beneath the deceptively self-evident commonplace *lex orandi lex credendi*. At the surface level this maxim seems plausible enough: of course there is reciprocity between worship and doctrine! All decent doctrine is prayable, and all decent prayer reflects and inculcates sound doctrine! If this were all there is to it, we could without further ado simply commend the motto to religious educators for practical implementation. But our little motto is not as simple or innocent as it seems. The original form of our now simplified saying was *ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* – “that the obligatory manner of praying may determine the obligatory manner of believing.” The clause comes from a fifth century collection of anti-Pelagian pronouncements by Roman pontiffs, compiled probably by Saint Prosper of Aquitaine.¹ The original meaning then is clear: the authoritative rule of prayer determines the rule of believing, not vice versa.

It seems that for theologians under the influence of the Reformation, *lex orandi lex credendi* is generally a two-way street, with the rule of faith having the primacy. For certain Roman Catholic writers, on the other hand, the primacy belongs decidedly to the rule of prayer, with the traffic moving decisively in one direction, from liturgy to theology. Such, at least, are the broad conclusions to be drawn from a perusal of Aidan Kavanagh’s *On Liturgical Theology*, and of David Fagerberg’s *What Is Liturgical Theology?*² Fagerberg, himself a former Lutheran, relies heavily on Kavanagh on the one hand, and on the late Russian Orthodox liturgiologist Alexander Schmemmann (whom also Kavanagh invokes) on the other. To clarify just what is at stake, let us converse a bit with these authors, and then draw some conclusions of our own.

¹Cyprian Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1976), 529.

²Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1984); David Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology?* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992).

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Following Kavanagh, Fagerberg distinguishes between primary and secondary theology, or *theologia prima* and *secunda*, or first order and second order theology. "Primary theology" is what happens in the liturgy, or more precisely, in the liturgical act or "rite." "Secondary theology" is the systematic reflection upon the primary, liturgical reality. The inescapable conclusion is that liturgy is primary, and dogmatics is secondary theology. Does that mean that liturgy is the chicken that lays the eggs of dogmatics? Fagerberg repeatedly criticises those who would resolve the "chicken-or-the-egg question" by allowing liturgy and theology to take turns—sometimes one being chicken, sometimes the other.³ His own conclusion is:

lex orandi establishes *lex credendi* and not vice versa. This is not affirmed merely because it can be demonstrated that in most cases a doctrine's formulation was influenced by some antecedent liturgical practice. No, the claim means that the *ekklesia's lex credendi* is fundamentally worked out in the ritual logistics of *leitourgia* which brings the Church and its faith into being. Therefore we reject the very set-up of what we have been calling the chicken-or-the-egg question. The historical question of which influence came first, liturgical practice or doctrinal teaching, is irrelevant. That the law of prayer establishes the law of faith does not hang on the question of temporal priority. *Leitourgia* is not an expression of an idea (I have a body or I am a body), it is epiphanous (I am bodily).⁴

Again:

Leitourgia establishes theology in the way community establishes individual, Tradition establishes icon, gospel establishes homily. It is not mainly a chronological relationship, but a normative one. *Lex orandi* establishes *lex credendi*.⁵

Or:

Theology is influenced by liturgy, yes; but *leitourgia* establishes theology because the grammar of *lex orandi* precedes (normatively) the *lex credendi* of the community and individual.⁶

This does not mean that either Kavanagh or his interpreter, Fagerberg, advocates a doctrine-free, mumbo-jumbo ritualism. Both men, and certainly also Schmemann, are at pains to disavow a mere smells-and-

³One may see Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 71, 134, and 141.

⁴Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 195.

⁵Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 200.

⁶Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 211.

bells liturgical dilettantism. Indeed, some of Kavanagh's most devastating rhetoric is directed against the notion of "Christian life sunk in a miasma of ritual obsession":⁷

Sacramental discourse in fact is often thought of as theological adiaphora best practised by those with a taste for banners, ceremonial, and arts and crafts. It is regarded as an academically less than disciplined swamp in which Anglican high churchmen, Orthodox bishops, and many if not all Roman Catholics and others are hopelessly mired. . . . A good example of this attitude is the following description in the catalogue of a certain academic institution for the summer course 106, "Creative Worship": "How to creatively use liturgy, liturgical robes, banners and stoles in both worship and church school. Discover exciting 'tools' for spreading the Good News!". . . Besides being marginally literate, the description cannot bear much scrutiny, because the notion of Church which lies behind it seems to be that of an ecclesiastical boutique. The relationship of embroidery to the driving of a diesel locomotive seems easier to demonstrate than the connection between stoles and proclaiming the Gospel. Something here seems to have been enthusiastically trivialised. Incongruities are joined, reality warped, meaning maimed. Artifact becomes plaything, *sacramentum* a rubber duck.⁸

Fagerberg adds for good measure: "For many, liturgy means exactly no more than protocol, order, pastoral care, or esthetics, which is why what sometimes passes for liturgical theology is nothing more than neatening up the 'how.' Thus liturgy comes to be the province of quirky seminarians who get a thrill out of rubrical tidiness."⁹

Kavanagh and Fagerberg, however, are not content to assert simply that liturgy must have theological substance. Their claim is much more far-reaching. Fagerberg rejects the whole dichotomy "liturgy and theology," as though these were two different entities needing to be brought into some sort of working relationship. Thus a "theology of worship" is as inadequate as a "theology from worship." As examples of the former, Fagerberg cites works by Regin Prenter and Vilmos Vajta, and the latter he illustrates by way of Peter Brunner and Geoffrey Wainwright. Fagerberg devotes chapters 2 and 3 (some 120 pages), respectively to detailed discussions of the two conceptions of theology and worship. Prenter and Vajta are said to represent a "theology of

⁷Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 178.

⁸Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 46-47.

⁹Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 181.

worship." The basic criticism of this scheme is that worship or liturgy here are viewed as simply illustrations or expressions of doctrine or theology imposed, as it were, from without, rather than arising from the liturgy itself. Brunner's and Wainwright's schemes, dubbed "theology from worship," are marginally closer to the mark in that this option "not only wants doctrine to be expressed in liturgical form, it also wants worship to be rooted in doctrine."¹⁰ In other words, the latter view lays more stress on the *lex orandi*. Still, that is not enough.

What is wanted by our authors is nothing short of the total dominance of *lex orandi*, the rule of prayer, over the rule of faith, *lex credendi*. The crucial move here is the rejection of the dichotomy "theology and liturgy" in favour of their "organic" union in "liturgical theology." Let us hear Fagerberg verbatim to this point:

Our first affirmation is that liturgical theology is primary theology. . . . It is a truism to say encounter with God precedes reflection upon that encounter. Liturgy is encounter with God, but furthermore it is also a living adjustment, i.e. a theological response, to the Holy One. The division which puts raw experience in the sanctuary but theology in the office is here rejected. . . . The adjustment made by those who encounter God's holy presence in word and sacrament is an instance of *theologia prima*. . . . Because encounter with God precedes reflection upon that encounter, liturgy is the ontological condition for theology. This is what tradition means when it says that the law of prayer (*lex orandi*) establishes (*statuat*) the law of belief (*lex credendi*), and not vice versa. Thus our second affirmation is that liturgical theology originates and resides in the communal rite.¹¹

Or, in the blunt prose of Aidan Kavanagh:

For many this puts us on strange ground indeed, for since the high Middle Ages with the advent of the university and of scientific method, we have become accustomed to the notion that theology is something done in academies out of books by elites with degrees producing theologies of this and that. . . . To argue with minds accustomed to thinking of theology in such a manner that theology at its genesis is communitarian, even proletarian; that it is aboriginally liturgical in context, partly conscious and partly unconscious; . . . and that its agents are more likely to be charwomen and shopkeepers than pontiffs and professors—all this is to argue against the grain. It is to argue that the theology which we most readily recognise and practise is in fact neither primary nor seminal but secondary and

¹⁰Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 12.

¹¹Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 16-17.

derivative: *theologia secunda*. . . . For what emerges most directly from an assembly's liturgical act is not a new species of theology among others. It is *theologia* itself. . . . Theology on this primordial level is thus a sustained dialectic. Its *thesis* is the assembly as it enters into the liturgical act; its *antithesis* is the assembly's changed condition as it comes away from its liturgical encounter with the living God in Word and sacrament; its *synthesis* is the assembly's adjustment in faith and works to that encounter. The adjustment comprises whole sets of acts both great and small, conscious and unconscious, all of which add up to a necessarily critical and reflective theology. . . .¹²

One was called secondary theology, about which we talk a lot. The other was called primary theology, about which we talk little if at all. . . . A liturgical act is a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral, and foundational kind. . . . It is this constantly modulating, self-critical, and reflective adjustment to God-wrought change in the assembly's life of faith which constitutes the condition for doing all other forms of theology and of understanding the Word of God. It is not so much an isolated act as it is a state of continuing discourse within the worshipping fellowship, and the state is graced, self-critical, reflective, and altogether primary. It is the wellspring out of which the river of secondary theology arises and begins its flow by twists and turns to the sea. It is what liturgy enacts . . . the immense gravitational pull exerted by secondary theology makes all this not easy to do.¹³

I must apologize – not for Fagerberg and Kavanagh – but for my own lengthy quotations from their works. I simply see no other way to do justice to the complexity of their argumentation, without distorting it by paraphrase and interpretation. I trust, however, that it is now reasonably clear what these authors really mean by primary and secondary theology respectively. Despite the warning flags of certain turns of phrase in the quotations, it is entirely imaginable that many readers – and not only those of a churchly, liturgical orientation – will be inclined to respond viscerally with a hearty “Amen” to the primary and secondary distinctions developed here. Who could be so icy-veined as not to thrill to Kavanagh's bold *pronuntiamento*: “It was a Presence, not faith, which drew Moses to the burning bush, and what happened there was a revelation, not a seminar”?¹⁴ Down then with the academic pedantries of “secondary theology” – and hooray for the primacy of worship and

¹²Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 74-76.

¹³Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 88-90.

¹⁴Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 92.

devotion! Did not the Lord Himself call for confession rather than discussion of Him?

There are no doubt worthy motives in such instinctive reactions. But have the underlying issues been grasped correctly? Or are we being deceived by superficial first-hand impressions? Much of what is driving the Kavanagh-Fagerberg agenda seems indeed to be noble and genuine—a crusade for integrity and authenticity, and against sham and humbug in religion. If one found oneself mired in the swamps of an unbiblical, authoritarian papal scholasticism, the bright vision of “primary theology” could easily offer hope and promise of spiritual escape and liberation. Some such dynamic is suggested by Kavanagh’s complaint about modern English versions of a ninth- or tenth-century prayer, which in the original had mentioned the pope and the local bishop and concluded “and with all right-worshipping cultivators of catholic and apostolic faith.”¹⁵ An imprimated 1961 English translation renders this: “and for all those right-believing teachers who have the guardianship of the catholic and apostolic faith”! Comments Kavanagh: “a considerable secondary theological paraphrase.” He goes on to complain that even after Vatican II, the official English version puts it like this: “and for all those who hold and teach the catholic faith that comes to us from the apostles.” He grumbles about the switch from “right worship” to “right believing” and “right teaching, and both are by the context centered upon church officials.” He laments the servitude of right worship “to correct belief and teaching by church officials and secondary theologians.”¹⁶ Again:

Furthermore the liturgical assembly, which has been meeting under God fifty-two times a year for the past 2,000, now must be regarded as a theological cipher drawing whatever theological awareness it has not from its own response to its graced encounter with the living God, but from sources found in ecclesiastical bureaucracies and within the walls of academe. The served has become servant, mistress has become handmaid.¹⁷

The quest for spiritual liberation is unmistakable. Yet there is another, more secular agenda underlying the Kavanagh-Fagerberg paradigm of primary versus secondary theology. Cyprian Vagaggini’s rather more

¹⁵Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 81.

¹⁶Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 82.

¹⁷Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 83.

traditionalist *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy* draws attention to the liberal-modernist exploitation of the *lex orandi*:

It is well known that the modernists supposed they could find in the formula *lex orandi lex credendi* their theories on the concept of the faith as blind feeling, completely extraneous to discursive reason, which is generated in the subconscious and is expressed in some way in the practical and religious life, especially in the liturgy. The liturgy in turn would be the generative rule of dogmatic formulas, and these would be nothing but an attempt to express intellectually the state reached at a certain moment of development by that same blind religious feeling. Thus the blind religious feeling, extraneous to reason and continually changeable, which somehow makes its states extrinsic in the liturgy, would also command the formulation and the meaning of the dogmas, as well as the necessity of their continual adaptation, even substantial, to its variation.¹⁸

Comments the Italian author: "There is no need to waste time on such an interpretation of the formula *lex orandi lex credendi*. It is completely foreign to the Catholic meaning and falls with the concept of faith and of dogma which it presupposes."¹⁹

Clearly neither Kavanagh nor Fagerberg advocate "primary theology" simply as "blind religious feeling," liturgically expressed. Both are at pains to show that their "primary theology" is really theology and not blind, amorphous experience. Kavanagh: "The language of liturgy is not just religious rhetoric in need of disciplining by the scientific rigour of secondary theology. The language of liturgy is . . . a primary *theological language* different from, but architectonic of, the language of theologians," or "The language of worship mediates the substance on which bishops, councils, and theologians reflect. Without that substance, their sort of theology would have no referent."²⁰

Both Kavanagh and Fagerberg defer a great deal to the Russian Orthodox Father Alexander Schmemmann, as representative of a presumably more authentic and patristic liturgical theology. At one point, however, Fagerberg actually comes close to criticizing Schmemmann:

After all this talk about theology being grounded in and springing from the liturgy, after this defense of liturgy as the ontological condition for theology and its norm, after arguing for a special methodology for liturgical theology

¹⁸Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 530.

¹⁹Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 530-531.

²⁰Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 123-124.

which begins with historical structural analysis, Fr. Schmemmann is able to say—with a straight face, apparently—that there also needs to be a theological critique of the liturgy!²¹

But Fagerberg is quick to point out in response that “the faith ritually expressed can be lost to arbitrariness,” and that for Schmemmann, the theological critique of such arbitrariness (“several strata of pseudo theological and pseudo pious explanations and interpretations, . . . a superficial pseudo symbolism, . . . individualism and legalism”) must arise from within the liturgical tradition itself.²² However, says Schmemmann himself, “it is not easy today . . . to rediscover and to communicate the real ‘key’ of the Orthodox liturgical tradition, to connect it again to the *lex credendi*.”²³ Thus Schmemmann’s sort of theological critique escapes the alleged errors of Prenter, Vajta, Brunner, and Wainwright:

He does not mean finding a doctrinal key to the liturgical rite, a theological plumb line for liturgical reform. He is not lapsing back to a liturgical resourcement of *a priori* doctrinal propositions. This is what theology of liturgy has often done, yes: searched for a consistent theology of worship with which liturgy must comply once it is formulated. But the theological task is to find the meaning of the Ordo exactly in its structures.²⁴

This critical talk about a “doctrinal key” or “a theological plumb line” really has in mind something very concrete, viz. the Reformation’s doctrinally based purification of late medieval liturgical forms and aberrations. Consider Fagerberg’s summary of Vajta’s main point:

In the contrast between justification and work righteousness, we encounter this center of Luther’s whole thought. Vajta has attempted to show that Luther’s critique of the Mass stems not from reactionary objection to external form, nor from simplistic objection to sacrificial categories and repetition of the Mass, but rather from the fundamental distinction between righteousness as God’s mercy (gift) as opposed to righteousness as God’s justice which humans must fulfill.²⁵

Here at last we are face to face with the crux of the Reformation: what is the gospel? Is it the glorious trinitarian truth of full and free salvation

²¹Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 172.

²²Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 176.

²³Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 176-177.

²⁴Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 173.

²⁵Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 51.

in the incarnate Son of God — *sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura* — to which everything else must yield, even an angel from heaven (Galatians 1:8!), how much more than various details of liturgy or ritual, no matter how “traditional”? Or is the gospel a complex amalgam to be pieced together from or read out of the bric-a-brac of traditional ecclesiastical ritual? The contradiction between the two views could not be more glaring — there can be no compromise between them.

For the church of the purely preached gospel and the rightly administered sacraments, justification is indeed the heart and soul of everything, and is therefore also *the* criterion for the whole life of the church. This very truth was unceremoniously surrendered by the pseudo-Lutheran bureaucracies of the “Lutheran” World Federation, when they agreed to the shameful Augsburg Concession to the Vatican in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1997). At the insistence of Cardinal Ratzinger’s Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, paragraph 18 of the Joint Declaration was amended to make justification “an indispensable criterion,” that is, one among others, rather than *the* unique and overarching such criterion for all teaching and practice!

Kavanagh also inveighs against the sixteenth century, when liturgical “interpretations took on a particular theological and polemical cast among both Reformers and Catholics, a step which led quickly to a secondary theology officially defined as ‘correct’ now determining rather than interpreting liturgical text and form.”²⁶ Again, justification is just one point among others: “. . .there was rather more afoot in the sixteenth century than some disagreements over justification, the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, and papal primacy.” Really? What could possibly be “rather more” than these? The astonishing answer is: “A sense of rite and symbol in the West was breaking down and under siege.”²⁷ So a “sense of rite and symbol” is more crucial than justification and the Real Presence? Again, the real villain is doctrine: “And the primary theological act which the liturgical act had once been now began to be controlled increasingly by practitioners of secondary theology whose concerns lay with correct doctrine in a highly polemical climate.”²⁸

²⁶Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 81.

²⁷Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 108.

²⁸Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 109.

There is in Kavanagh's work a persistent anti-doctrinal drumbeat:

The liturgy is neither structured nor does it operate in such a way as to provide doctrinal conclusions. These are distilled from the liturgy by theologians according to the general principle that data are not *given* but must be consciously *taken*. Doctrinal conclusions are lifted from the liturgical engagement of Christians by theologians whose consciousness at the time of the lifting ineluctably affects what is lifted. This means that doctrinal conclusions are selective and may well tell one more about the theologian, and about the state of theological discourse at the time the conclusions are taken, than about the liturgy itself.²⁹

Does this not land us rather near the relativistic swamps of modernism which, as such, Kavanagh surely wishes to avoid?

Here is a particularly eloquent denunciation by Kavanagh of modern subjectivism:

"Real people" are regarded as existing prior to social discourse with others. This gives rise to the impression that whatever evils there may be are rooted in impersonality; that closeness between persons is requisite; that such closeness must be immediate and primary, and that this is the only way one grows — by sharing the unspoken with the unspoken-to (the most important things, we say, cannot be put into words). Anything that intrudes into this exclusive and fairly aphasic bond between sovereign individuals imperils the bond and is therefore oppressive — social things especially, such as customs, manners, law, role, reverence, even grammar. This produces people who are awash in an oceanic ideology of shifting intimacy which is replete with uncontrolled, unanchored, and undirected sacralities.³⁰

How can "liturgy," or if you please "leitourgia," cure this malaise apart from solid doctrine? In the absence of "secondary" doctrine is it not a matter of driving out one "immediate and primary" "closeness" with another? What is this "primary theology" anyway, if it is not truth or doctrine? Kavanagh's favorite term for it is "rite":

Rite involves creeds and prayers and worship, but it is not any one of these things, nor all of these things together, and it orchestrates more than these things. Rite can be called a whole style of Christian living found in the myriad particularities of worship, of laws called "canonical," of ascetical and monastic structures, of evangelical and catechetical endeavours, and in particular ways of doing secondary theology. A liturgical act concretizes all

²⁹Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 126.

³⁰Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 28.

these and in doing so makes them accessible to the community assembled in a given time and place before the living God for the life of the world.³¹

Later the sixteenth century is blamed for "a new system of worship which would increasingly do without rite, one in which printed texts would increasingly bear the burden formerly borne by richly ambiguous corporate actions done with water, oil, food, and the touch of human hands."³² Are "oil" and "hands" really that much more "richly ambiguous" than the despised "smells and bells"? Can "corporate actions," no matter how "richly ambiguous," really rise above the level of trivial ritualism and mumbo-jumbo apart from the clear word, truth, and doctrine of God? Why then all this exaltation of ambiguity? Why the flight from doctrinal clarity?

In the end, Fagerberg appeals to George Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" theory of religion. Lindbeck, of course, reduces doctrine from revealed truth to mere "grammatical rule." With one stroke the whole question of truth is side-lined into irrelevance.³³ But the ecumenical prospects are rosy:

The cultural-linguistic theory takes liturgy seriously as a locus for theology. . . . Ecumenical concord might then be recovered when a commonly shared code can be perceived despite differences of encodement. Then our unity would lie in orthodoxy (right worship; *doxa* means glory) rather than uniform orthodidaskalia (right teaching) or fuzzy orthopistis (right believing). Such would be the power of Pentecost.³⁴

Kavanagh strikes an even more explicitly agnostic note:

It is thus hard for Wainwright to see how absolute certainty could attach to any doctrinal conclusion drawn from the worship of the Church. Absolute

³¹Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 100.

³²Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 108.

³³George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 54-55: "One can admit the unsubstitutable uniqueness of the God-willed missions of non-Christian religions when one thinks of these faiths, not as objectifying poorly what Christianity objectifies well (as Karl Rahner proposes), but as cultural-linguistic systems within which potentialities can be actualized and realities explored that are not within the direct purview of the peoples of Messianic witness, but that are nevertheless God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom. This obviously is a biblical argument for a practice of interreligious dialogue that was unthinkable in biblical times and that the Bible nowhere discusses, either to approve or disapprove."

³⁴Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 301-302.

certainty is a rather large order to expect of any conclusion, doctrinal or otherwise, drawn from anywhere. The lives of people rarely wait on such certainty before proceeding to the business at hand. To expect that the worship life of faithful people will yield up absolute doctrinal certainty seems to expect a lot from lives which do not themselves, whether in worship or out of it, move to absolute certainty on any or all matters human or divine. . . . A people's liturgy, like the people themselves, does not wait upon absolute certainty. It, like them, takes risks, even faith risks, because plausibility, unlike absolute certainty, is rife with risk. Standing before the living God is a risky business.³⁵

Here is secularization with a vengeance! This is the very *monstrum incertitudinis* which Luther rejected in the frivolous word-games of scholasticism! Theology deals only in *credibilia* (things to be believed), not *probabilia* (mere probable opinions), the province of sophists: "let scholastic doctors be scholastics; all of them put together do not suffice, with their opinions, to confirm one single sermon."³⁶ All true theology is eminently preachable.

All this is turned on its head when adiaphora become primary and doctrine secondary. This is a mockery of the truth, which alone can make us free. Mere ritualism enslaves us instead to human opinion, be that ancient superstition or the latest post-modern *Zeitgeist* (for example, Lindbeck).

There is an interesting autobiographical note in Fagerberg's book: "This book was written when the author was a Lutheran pastor; as it was being published the author is Roman Catholic. . . . The basis of this book was my dissertation at Yale in which I tried to outline the perimeters of liturgical theology; then I blinked and saw an ecclesiology, one which drew me into the Roman Catholic liturgical tradition."³⁷ No doubt the ritualist-traditionalist bondage can seem quite bracing compared to that of ELCA/Yale nihilist anomia!

How error-prone liturgical evolution is without strict doctrinal controls, is made clear by none other than Kavanagh's and Fagerberg's star-witness for "liturgical theology," Alexander Schmemmann. He points out the baneful effect of Byzantine court ceremonial on the liturgy in the

³⁵Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 125.

³⁶Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 58 volumes (Weimar, 1883-), 1:246. Hereafter abbreviated as *WA*.

³⁷Fagerberg, *Liturgical Theology*, 8.

fourth century. Before that Christian worship had been "profoundly solemn with an inner solemnity, and devoid of external solemnity," whilst "the pagan cults were shot through with this external solemnity and Christians regarded this style of worship as *pompa diabola*."³⁸ Further:

In the Byzantine epoch the emphasis was gradually transferred from the assembly of the Church to the exclusive and actually self-sufficient significance of the clergy as celebrants of the mystery. . . . One of the final stages of this development will be the transferring of the name 'holy doors' from the doors of the church building to the doors of the iconostasis, with the prohibiting of all but ordained persons to enter these doors.

Thus "Byzantine thought came to the conclusion that the true mystery of consecration was not Baptism, but the sacrament of Ordination. In the light of this theory the majority of those who had earlier been regarded as 'consecrated' were now 'deconsecrated'." The cult having become a mystery, the "altar or sanctuary became its place, and access to the sanctuary was closed to the uninitiated" that is, the unordained.³⁹

Perhaps the classic examples of false doctrine by liturgical evolution are provided by Vagaggini:

The liturgy is one of the principal contributors to the evolution of dogma, as that evolution is admitted by Catholic teaching. This is the kernel of truth which was contained in the modernist interpretation of the principle *lex orandi lex credendi*. . . . The reader who has followed this long reasoning has certainly been thinking continually of the case of the Immaculate Conception and of the Assumption. And rightly so. These two cases are the most recent and most conspicuous demonstration of the influence of the liturgy on the development of a dogma. . . . Who could be sure, for example, that the doctrine of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces is not on the same road toward definition?⁴⁰

As Hermann Sasse pointed out just after the Second Vatican Council, and precisely in connexion with the Marian dogmas: "But in the very moment in which we *de facto* subordinate the Scriptures to the authority of the Church, the Church becomes not only the judge, but also the source of doctrine."⁴¹

³⁸Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction To Liturgical Theology*, second edition (New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 94.

³⁹Schmemmann, *Introduction*, 99, 101.

⁴⁰Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 533, 541.

⁴¹*Holy Church or Holy Writ*. Interchange Supplementary Paper (Sydney: IVF

The Augsburg Confession makes it perfectly clear just what is primary and what is secondary: "For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church, that the Gospel be preached there unanimously according to its pure understanding, and the sacraments be administered in keeping with the divine Word. And it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church, that uniform ceremonies, instituted by men, be observed everywhere."⁴²

The blessed primacy of the evangelical truth, of God-given doctrine, *doctrina divina*, is stressed by the Church of the Augsburg Confession as by none other. Ritual and constitution are central for Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy – and perhaps ethics for Calvinism – in a way in which these things can never be central for the Lutheran Church, whose distinctive modern form was conceived in Theses, born of a Confession, and weaned on a Formula!

To the preached word or doctrine everything else is subordinated – human ritual absolutely, but even the divine sacraments relatively:

For the greatest of all, holiest, most necessary, highest worship, which God has required as the greatest in the First and Second Commandments, is to preach God's Word; for the preaching office is the highest office in the church.⁴³

For the ceremony of the mass or of the Lord's Supper . . . [was] instituted for the sake of preaching, as Paul says: "As often as you eat this Bread and drink the Cup, you are to proclaim the Lord's death."⁴⁴

If the office of teaching be entrusted to anyone, then everything accomplished by the Word in the church is entrusted, that is, the office of baptising, consecrating, binding, loosing, praying, and judging doctrine. . . . Even Christ chiefly proclaimed the gospel, as the highest function of his office, and did not baptise [John 4:2]. Paul, too, gloried in the fact that he was sent not to baptise [I Corinthians 1:17], as to a secondary office, but to the primary office of preaching the gospel.⁴⁵

Graduate Fellowship, 1967), 22.

⁴²Augsburg Confession VII, 2, 3, German.

⁴³Augsburg Confession XV, 42, German.

⁴⁴Augsburg Confession XXIV, 35, German.

⁴⁵Luther's Works, American Edition, 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), "Concerning the Ministry," 40:36. Hereafter abbreviated as *LW*.

Truly the Gospel is the one most sure and noble mark of the church, much surer than Baptism and the Bread, because [the church] is conceived, made, nurtured, borne, trained, fed, clothed, adorned, armed, and preserved only through the Gospel. In short, the church's whole life and being consists in the Word of God.⁴⁶

For the pulpit can and must alone preserve Baptism, Sacrament, doctrine, articles of faith, and all estates in their purity.⁴⁷

This reflects exactly what is true primary theology in Holy Scripture, namely the confession of the divine truth or doctrine. The classic confession of course is that of Saint Peter in Saint Matthew 16:16: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord does not respond that this is a fine, secondary reflection on a primal or primary experience! No: "flesh and blood has not revealed [this] to you, but My Father, Who is in heaven." What Peter confesses is exactly what has been revealed to him — not "rite" or ritual clues or approximations, but truth itself, yes, "propositional" truth — and it can be restated without loss of truth, for example, the parallels in Mark 8 and Luke 9. The biblical source of all of our trinitarian creeds is the proposition: *Jesus is Lord* (that is, YHWH!). The rest of Christian dogma is simply further amplification of this central truth, for instance, 1 Timothy 3:16: "Great is the mystery of our religion, etc." The very words of our God incarnate "are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). They let us know the truth which makes us free (John 8:32). This is the "apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), the "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) for which, in all the articles of faith, our whole Book of Concord contends so earnestly!

We are back with the traditional two basic meanings of "theology": objectively it means the content, the God-given doctrine, and subjectively it means the God-given sufficiency to be "able ministers of the New Testament" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Which then is the primary meaning, the objective or the subjective? Pieper says: "Obviously the first and proper meaning of the term *theology* is theology in the subjective sense, aptitude. . . . For, as Walther says: 'Theology must first be in the soul of a man before he can teach it, present it in speech and writing.'"⁴⁸ Given

⁴⁶WA 7:721.12; English version in C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 70.

⁴⁷LW 28:62.

⁴⁸Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951-1953), 1:45.

our present age of rampant subjectivism and sentimentality, and therefore theology-by-sob-story, I respectfully prefer the logic of Luther against Karlstadt and the "heavenly prophets":

But whatever their measure or order the outward factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the outward. God has determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward. For He wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by Him. . .

Observe carefully, my brother, this order, for everything depends on it. However cleverly this factious spirit makes believe that he regards highly the Word and Spirit of God and declaims passionately about love and zeal for the truth and righteousness of God, he nevertheless has as his purpose to reverse this order. His insolence leads him to set up a contrary order and, as we have said, seeks to subordinate God's outward order to an inner spiritual one. Casting this order to the wind with ridicule and scorn, he wants to get to the Spirit first.⁴⁹

The outward, revealed Word, truth, or doctrine of God is theology in its most basic, primal sense. This objective theology is the source and means from which alone issues genuine theology in the subjective sense, as the spiritual competence of the ministers of the New Testament. In a time when divine truth is the object of journalistic scorn and hysteria without, and of ritualistic, pseudo-theological, and bureaucratic evasion within the church, may the Lord of the Church inflame our dear Synod once more with love and zeal for these incomparable riches!

⁴⁹LW 40:146-147.