

## LITURGY AND THE DISCERNING WORLDVIEW: ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITURGY AND ETHICS\*

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### ABSTRACT

What is the relation between ethical discernment and liturgy? Do Christian rituals provide enough space for ethical thinking? What is the nature of the certainty that discernment in ritual is correct? This study explores these questions in the context of the recent debate on the relationship between liturgy and ethics. It proceeds in five steps. Firstly, it briefly outlines the question of the foundation of Christian ethics with the help of the theology of Karl Barth. Secondly, it presents the joint task of ethics and liturgy, which teach us to see the world *sub specie Christi*. Thirdly, following Gordon Lathrop, it treats the problem of ritual constructing false worldviews: the hierarchical distortion, the distortion of the closed circle, and spiritual consumerism. In the next part, it explores how different ritual strategies open the space for actual ethical thinking in liturgy. The last part focuses on the role of biblical narrative, images, and symbols that represent the crucial source of the discerning worldview. The concluding reflection returns to the opening questions arguing that our discernment must be always aware of its particularity and perspective. The unbroken certainty of seeing can only be placed on the eschatological horizon.

### Key words

Liturgy; Ritual; Ethics; Discernment; Worldview; Liturgics; Bible; Consumerism; Hierarchism; Certainty

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The discernment between good and evil is a process that shapes the dynamics of human life. Since childhood, we have learned to discern what is good and bad and we practice our ethical stances more or less successfully in our moral actions. Christian rituals are of cardinal importance for both ethical thinking and moral conduct. They are considered to be the means of transmitting ethical norms and values. They form and influence ethical thinking, as well as motivate moral conduct.

The relationship between liturgy and ethics has been the subject of many contributions since the end of 1970s from ethicists and liturgists across the confessions. The debate was initiated by the edition of the thematic issue of *The Journal of Religious Ethics*. The American Methodist ethicist Ramsay pointed to the principal equality of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex bene operandi*.<sup>1</sup> Another American Methodist liturgist Don E. Saliers stressed the conceptual interconnection between the celebration of God and sanctification of a man in liturgy.<sup>2</sup> Several years later, the French Catholic liturgical theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet focused his attention on the close interconnection between liturgy and ethics. He approaches the ritual as the performance of the good: 'Ritual's regular repetition has an initiatory effect of the greatest importance. [...] it implants the values of the group into the body of each member.'<sup>3</sup> The American Lutheran liturgical theologian Frank Senn also deals with the formative function of Christian rituals. According to him, rituals not only have to do with what a community does before God, but also with what the members of a community do in interactions with one another. The Christian ritual is 'a pattern of behaviour that expresses and forms a way of life consistent with the community's beliefs and values'.<sup>4</sup> In the area of Catholic theology,<sup>5</sup> as well as in the context

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ramsey, 'Liturgy and Ethics,' *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 2 (1979): 139–171.

<sup>2</sup> Don E. Saliers, 'Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings,' *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 2 (1979): 173–189.

<sup>3</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 340.

<sup>4</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy. Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 3.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Martin Stuflesser and Stephan Winter, *Ahne nach, was du vollziehst ...? Positionsbestimmungen zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Ethik* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009).

of other Christian traditions<sup>6</sup> such as Anglicanism, Lutheranism, Reformed and even Orthodox churches, we find an enormous number of publications dealing with the topic of the relationship between liturgy and Christian life, as well as social and political justice, poverty, racism, violence, ecology, etc.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between liturgy and ethics should not only be explored unidirectionally. The liturgy is not merely a source of inspiration for ethics. Christian rituals involve ethical judgements, so that we can say with conviction that liturgy *is* ethics.<sup>8</sup> *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* is based on this assumption. Its editors, the American theologian Stanley Hauerwas and the Anglican priest Samuel Wells, introduce Christian ethics through analysis of the liturgy.<sup>9</sup> Writers from Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Mennonite, or Evangelical traditions approach particular themes such as penitence, punishment, rehearsing identity, practicing character, justice and liberation, poverty, hunger, and service. This is seen through the eyes of the liturgy by such acts as reconciliation, reading the Scriptures, interceding, sharing communion, and washing feet. Liturgy is considered to be an act of discipleship that forms the moral life.<sup>10</sup>

However, we can go even further and deal with the liturgy as an object of ethical critique. We can ask about the ethical relevance of Christian rituals. Does the formative impact of liturgy always tend toward a correct direction? Does it always guide toward a discernment between good and evil, as well as a discerning worldview? What is the nature of this certainty that discernment in ritual is correct? In this contribution, I will deal with the relationship between liturgy and ethics in both directions indicated. At the same time, it is necessary to

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Dorothea Haspelmath-Finatti, ed., *Called to Worship, Freed to Respond. Internationale Beiträge zum Zusammenspiel von Gottesdienst und Ethik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher-Verlagshaus, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> See the extensive surveys of bibliography in: Mark Searle, 'The Liturgy and Social Ethics. An Annotated Bibliography,' *Studia Liturgica* 21, no. 2 (1991): 220–235. D. Brent Laytham and David D. Bjorlin, 'Worship and Ethics: A Selected Bibliography,' *Studia Liturgica* 43 (2013): 169–188.

<sup>8</sup> See David L. Stubbs, 'Liturgy and Ethics, or Liturgy is Ethics,' *Reformed Review* 57, no. 3 (2004): 1–12 [online resource].

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publ., 2011). See also Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Gottesdienst als Lebensform – Ethik für Christenbürger* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Kohlhammer, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Pieter See Vos, *Liturgy and Ethics. New Contributions from Reformed Perspectives* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 2.

take into account that the ethical reflection should be discerned from moral action. According to the German theologian Dietmar Mieth, ‘the ethics reflects the acting in respect to the distinguishing between good and evil as well as correct and incorrect’.<sup>11</sup> Therefore I try to keep the differentiation between the level of theory and level of practice and focus on the first one.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the level of motivations does not guarantee that the action will be good and well-reasoned. In practice we can act badly despite our best motives and intentions. However, the correspondence of ethical theory with moral practice is a desired goal of ethics.

I proceed in five steps. Firstly, I briefly outline the question of the foundation of liturgical ethics with the help of the theology of Karl Barth. Then, I present the joint task of ethics and liturgy to teach us to see the world from the perspective of the kingdom of God. Thirdly, I deal critically with the construction of distorted worldviews in liturgy that we find across the church denominations. In the fourth part, I explore the interconnection between the ritual form and discernment, that is, how ritual strategies influence the conserving and renewing aspects of liturgy. In the fifth part, I focus on the crucial role of the biblical narrative, the images and symbols that frame our discerning worldview. In conclusion, I return to the opening question and argue that our discernment must always be aware of its substantial particularity and perspective.

## **1. New Adam – the Embodiment of Normativity and Freedom**

The topic of this study is the relationship of liturgy to the formation of ethical judgement. However, before dealing with it, we must not neglect the question of what the foundation and the crucial norm of Christian ethics is. What is the starting point for discernment between good and evil in the context of Christian faith? I would like to sketch two biblical images that Karl Barth uses in this context. The first concerns the fall and the second concerns Christ as the new Adam.

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<sup>11</sup> Dietmar Mieth, ‘Liturgie und Ethik. Der symboltheoretische Ansatz der Liturgiewissenschaft und der experientielle Ansatz der Theologischen Ethik im Gespräch,’ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 189, no. 2 (2009): 94–105, 94.

<sup>12</sup> The absence of the distinction between the form of moral acting (*Handlungsform*) and the form of ethical thinking (*Urteilsform*) is a problem which Mieth finds out by Bernd Wannenwetsch (Mieth, ‘Liturgie und Ethik,’ 95).

Since its beginnings, the creation is good (cf. Gen 1), but the desire to become equal to God disturbs the good relationships in it. 'For man is not content simply to be the answer to this [the ethical – T. L.] question by the grace of God. He wants to be like God. He wants to know of himself (as God does) what is good and evil. He therefore wants to give this answer himself and of himself.'<sup>15</sup> The story of the fall does not only concern the human desire to distinguish between good and evil according to the norms given by God. There is far more at stake. A human being wants governance over ethical norms and values, to play the role of the norm-maker. According to Barth, ethics (or the multifarious ethical system, the attempted human answers to the ethical question) is thus, in the long-term perspective, the result of the fall. The first task of the Christian ethics is simply to point to the covenant that God established with humankind. Obedience to that covenant is the human good. The main content of Christian ethics is to describe the sanctified human life: in other words, to describe the shape of the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

The second biblical image that should be mentioned in this context is the image of Jesus and his way of life. It is just this image what gives us an answer to the question of can we really get to know the content of God's covenant with people. As Karl Barth says, 'he is the answer to the ethical question put by God's grace'.<sup>15</sup> Christians see a new Adam in Jesus, who truly embodied God's image in his own life. He did not take the role of lawmaker, but lived as a human being submitting to God's will. This is how he embodied genuine humanity and, at the same time, the nature of God's acting. His story reveals God as someone who gives up his power in order to get closer to man and empower him to live in reconciled and loving relationships. His journey leading from the cross to the resurrection offers us perspective for the discernment between good and evil in our lives, the perspective of the kingdom of God, and thus becomes a pattern for our thoughts and actions. Christian ethics is not confronted with a set of rules but, as Barth suggests, with 'the reality fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. This person as such is not only

<sup>15</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik, II.2: Die Lehre von Gott* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A. G., 1942), 573. Quoted according to the English translation: *Church Dogmatics II.2* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 517.

<sup>14</sup> David L. Stubbs, 'Liturgy and Ethics, or Liturgy is Ethics,' *Reformed Review* 57, no. 3 (2004): 1–12, 1–2. Online resource.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik II.2*, 573. (*Church Dogmatics*, 517.)

the ground and content but also the form of the divine claim. And it is in this person and only in Him that the identity of authority and freedom is accomplished.<sup>16</sup> Jesus embodied freedom and the normativity for what is demanded of us.

## 2. Liturgy Teaches us to See the World through the Perspective of the Kingdom of God

Before we can judge and before we can act, we must learn to *see*. In his influential theory of the formation of moral judgement the German ethician, Heinz-Eduard Tödt, puts seeing in the first place in the chain of the six major aspects of this process.<sup>17</sup> Seeing is the starting point and one of the main tasks of Christian ethics. In a similar way, the American ethician Stanley Hauerwas claims, ‘ethics is first a way of seeing before it is a matter of doing. The ethical task is not to tell you what is right or wrong but rather to train you to see. That explains why, in the church, a great deal of time and energy are spent in the act of worship: In worship, we are busy looking in the right direction.’<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, the task of ethics and liturgy is the same. In liturgy we learn to see the world in the perspective of the kingdom of God, so that liturgy is – metaphorically – ‘a window of the Kingdom’.<sup>19</sup> Many theologians dealing with the relationship between liturgy and ethics share such an opinion. The South-African theologian, Bethel Müller, who elaborates on the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer proclaims that ‘Christian worship is one of these specific locations where the faithful are trained to see, to look in the right direction, to see the world sub specie Christi’.<sup>20</sup>

The essential difference between liturgy and ethics is that liturgy does not only comprise the level of reflection, but the level of action as well. It does not only concern our thinking and speaking but also our physical actions that become transparent for the patterns of the kingdom of God. Moreover, the liturgy – first of all the baptism, the Lord’s

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<sup>16</sup> Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik II.2*, 674. (Church Dogmatics, 606.)

<sup>17</sup> Heinz Eduard Tödt, ‘Versuch einer ethischen Theorie sittlicher Urteilsfindung,’ *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik*, 21 (1977): 81–93. Later many reprints.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 95.

<sup>19</sup> See Stubbs, ‘Liturgy and Ethics, or Liturgy is Ethics,’ 2.

<sup>20</sup> Bethel A. Müller, ‘Worship and Ethics: The Role of Worship and Ethics on the Road Towards Reconciliation,’ *Verbum et Ecclesia* 27, no. 2 (2006): 641–663, 645.

Prayer and Eucharist – is not only the witness of God’s kingdom, but becomes its anticipation, due to the activity of God’s Spirit, ‘a foretaste of participation in the heavenly liturgy’.<sup>21</sup> Liturgy – as God’s service to a man and as human service to God – is not only a matter of our mind, but it is a symbolic and ritual action.<sup>22</sup> It narrates and anamnestically celebrates God’s story with our world, invites us into it, opens the approach to it, writes the story further. It gives us an opportunity to live in this story with reflection and physically as well. ‘The liturgy is the embodiment of the patterns of the kingdom of God in summary fashion.’<sup>23</sup>

However, let us go back to the connection between liturgy and seeing. Christian rituals, as the American liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop points out, belong to rituals expressing and constructing a specific worldview.<sup>24</sup> We only have to notice what and who we pray for in our liturgies, what we confess as a sin, how and with whom we are allowed to share food in the Eucharist, how our solidarity with poor is expressed, how the space is arranged in which we celebrate the liturgy. All these liturgical practices comprise a certain worldview and this worldview influences both the seeing and ethical judgement of the participants in liturgy.

As an example, I would use the baptismal liturgy. Theologically, we understand baptism as an act in which the person is removed from the power of evil in the world, submitting himself or herself to the power of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Such a meaning is verbally expressed in the baptismal liturgy in the act of the renunciation of evil and holding on to Christ, as well as physically through symbolic actions such as immersion and surfacing (or the pouring of water), dressing in baptismal vestment, handing over the baptismal candle, etc. Then it is possible to claim that baptism is ‘a constant criticism of all politics, a constant hole in our political, religious and cosmological systems, calling those systems away from absolutizing tendencies’.<sup>26</sup> Baptism enables us to see the place where we stay as beloved by God and connected to all other

<sup>21</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, article 8.

<sup>22</sup> See Tabita Landová and Michaela Vlčková, ‘Ritual Imagination in Contemporary Catholicism and Protestantism,’ *Communio viatorum* 60 (2018): 97–112.

<sup>23</sup> Stubbs, ‘Liturgy and Ethics, or Liturgy is Ethics,’ 5.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground. A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 17.

places, as well as to see the oppressive structures that truly surround us. Baptism points out that these structures are not eternal; their decisive power was broken in Christ, therefore they should be challenged and changed.

The principal framework of Christian rituals is the biblical narrative, the story of God's covenant with his creation and his people, which culminates in the story of Jesus Christ. The worldview implied in rituals is thus essentially influenced by the interpretation of biblical tradition. If the biblical narrative, images and symbols are fairly interpreted in the assembly, they have a subversive function. As Bill W. Kellerman claims, 'liturgy signifies and celebrates the end of one world and the beginning of another. In that sense faithful worship is inherently subversive.'<sup>27</sup> In a similar way the American Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, points out how biblical stories and images provoke 'a counter-imagination of the world' so that we see the world differently from the perspective of other worldviews that are publicly spread around the globe by the world powers, social structures or individuals.<sup>28</sup>

Brueggemann's approach also influenced some Czech theologians, especially the Prague practical theologian Pavel Filipi in the area of homiletics.<sup>29</sup> However, what he claims about the task of preaching can be similarly said about the liturgy as a whole. Gordon Lathrop points out that the narrative used in the assembly serves as 'an antinarrative' to our cultural narratives and leads to 'a new openness to the holy Ground'.<sup>30</sup> Thus the world constructed in rituals invites us to come in, experience our relationships differently and return to everyday life having been transformed in one's views. Precisely this disruption of stereotyped perspectives and the opening of new insights in ritual helps us to the deeper discernment between good and evil, to the hope for change and the strengthening of one's responsibility for our conduct in the world.

In this connection, it is necessary to emphasise that Christian liturgy is not only a personal event, but also a communal event that involves

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<sup>27</sup> Bill W. Kellerman, *Seasons of Faith and Conscience: Kairos, Confession, Liturgy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, *Text Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 20. Czech translation: *Bible a postmoderní představivost: Písmo jako scénář života*, trans. Sláma (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> See Pavel Filipi, *Pozvání k naději. Kapitoly z homiletické exegeze* (Praha: Kalich, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 17.



a spatial as well as social understanding of things.<sup>31</sup> Christian rituals are enacted at a certain place, in some local community, they relate to its situation. At the same time, they reconnect local communities with one another and with the rest of the world. Now, the discerning view that takes place in Christian rituals is not confined to personal and local matters. The horizons opened in rituals must go beyond the interests of individuals and local communities. As Brueggemann stresses, ‘the practice of Christian interpretation in preaching and liturgy is contextual, local and pluralistic’.<sup>32</sup> This is a great hermeneutical challenge for all those preparing specific liturgies.

Another aspect important to the formation of the ethical judgement is experience. Experience – no matter whether aesthetic, moral, or religious – arises from pre-reflexive forms (perception, event, encounter etc.) and requires retrospective commemoration, narration, presentation, and reflection. In the moral experience, we may distinguish three types of experiences: that of contrast, as well as the experience of orientation and motivation. Dietmar Mieth, in his contribution on liturgy and ethics, emphasised that sense for justice (*sollen*) is often provoked precisely when we experience the contrast (*Kontrasterfahrung*), e.g. the injustice that aroused moral outrage.<sup>33</sup> Sharing the experience of contrast is also a frequent way how biblical authors attempt to express what God’s justice means, as well as the necessity of social justice, such as in prophetic books revealing the injustice (Amos, Hosea) or in Jesus’s blessings (Matt 5,6).

### 3. Constructing Distorted Worldviews in Liturgy

Liturgy proposes a worldview from the perspective of the kingdom of God. However, is this always the fact? Does liturgy always operate in an open, but critical conversation with other worldviews? The experiences of many Christians from different times and different places in our world show us that this is not always the case. We said that the worldview constructed in liturgy is essentially determined through the interpretation of biblical texts. In this connection one must take into account that there are also other powerful influences at play: specific historical situations,

<sup>31</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *Text Under Negotiation*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Mieth, ‘Liturgie und Ethik,’ 97–98. He adopted the term *Kontrasterfahrung* already in 1970s from Edward Schillebeeckx.

culture, current church, as well as social and political structures. People create rituals, no matter whether unique or gradually formed in the long chain of tradition and, performing them, insert their own worldviews into them. This can even be affected, along with the influences mentioned above, by the distorted interpretation of Scripture.

That is the reason Lathrop speaks of the ‘ritual constructing false worlds’,<sup>54</sup> concerning the danger that liturgy can in some circumstances express a worldview, that does not correspond to the perspective of the Kingdom. Our liturgy can serve to celebrate our unchanged identities and worldviews, such as when we acclaim the human being as the crown of creation and knowingly ignore the human destruction of the environment and its cruelty to animals, etc.<sup>55</sup> Among examples of these ‘false worlds’ mentioned by Lathrop are hierarchical distortion and that of the ‘closed circle’.<sup>56</sup>

In the Catholic tradition, the idea of the hierarchical shape of liturgy is well known and also adopted by the constitution of Vatican Council II *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in the context of liturgy.<sup>57</sup> In practice, the hierarchical approach finds expression in those liturgical elements that underline the role and power of clerics (e.g. the presider place in the shape of a throne, the entering procession reminiscent of the entrance of monarch, etc.). Although all these elements can be explained from their traditional and anthropological positions, Lathrop calls them into question from the perspective of the Gospel. He points out that the hierarchical ordering into ranks and orders corresponds to the Platonic idea of the emanation of being, knowledge, and light flowing from the single, divine centre through the great chain of heavenly hierarchy, to be thinly manifested in the physical world. The hierarchy reflects a certain cosmology, and when this conceptualisation is present in liturgy, it is in tension with the patterns of the kingdom of God to which Jesus points: ‘But whoever would be great among you must be your servant’ (Mark 10,43).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 179.

<sup>55</sup> Jennifer E. Brown, ‘Can Christian Worship Influence Attitudes and Behaviour Toward Animals?’ *Journal of Animal Ethics* 9, no. 1 (2019): 47–65.

<sup>56</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 182–192.

<sup>57</sup> See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, article 26: ‘Liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it; but they concern the individual members of the Church in different ways, according to their differing rank, office, and actual participation.’

<sup>58</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 184.

According to Lathrop, we must get over the Neoplatonic rationalisation of the idea of hierarchy, initiated by Pseudo-Dionysius in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, as well as from the perspective of the Gospel radically reconceive the positions of power, what is above and below: ‘Every one of us – bishop and priest included – do not first of all participate in the liturgy “according to our order”. We first of all participate, hands out as beggars with all beggars, for the sake of once again encountering mercy, once again coming to faith. Bishops should not be kings.’<sup>39</sup> In this connection, one must welcome all events that enable such a rethinking to become reality.

Recently, the present Pope Francis brought the servant dimension of the authority to attention when he practiced the ritual of washing feet on Green Thursday in an unconventional way (in more detail see below). This ritual also initiated Czech Catholic theologians to similar reflection. František Kunetka from Olomouc reacts to the pope’s ritual by stating that ‘we often behave as supervisors of grace, and not as its instruments. But the church is not a customs, it is a fatherly house.’<sup>40</sup> The pope’s adaptation of the ritual testifies to his understanding, that ‘in the church, the only one acceptable authority is the authority of service’.<sup>41</sup>

Another problem we meet for example in some Protestant churches is the celebration of liturgy in a closed community, whose view concentrates only on itself and its inner problems. Shared ritual, which strengthens mutual relationships, can easily draw a line around the community, even when it does not intend such a line. In the case of a closed circle, the Christian ritual loses its social and cosmological dimension. However, similar to Jesus who ate with traitors, the unclean and sinners, it is necessary to open the Christian ritual to the contradictions of our contemporary world. Otherwise, we will construct a worldview of our closed projections in liturgy with no room for ruptures and contradictions in the world, as well as no room for ‘the hole in the heavens above God’s holy Ground’.<sup>42</sup>

There are also other distorted worldviews in Christian rituals, particularly spiritual consumerism. After Jean Baudrillard analysed the

<sup>39</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 187.

<sup>40</sup> František Kunetka, ‘Obřad umývání nohou v liturgii Zeleného čtvrtku: Anamnésis nebo mímésis?’ *Studia theologica* 20, no. 2 (2018): 67–107, 104–105.

<sup>41</sup> Kunetka, ‘Obřad umývání nohou v liturgii Zeleného čtvrtku,’ 89–90.

<sup>42</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 192.

structures and functioning of the consumer society,<sup>43</sup> the topic also became a frequent issue of discussion among theologians and liturgists. Vincent J. Miller in his *Consuming Religion* (2003) convincingly points out that the processes of commodification take place not only in the area of culture, but also in the area of religion, since consumerism does not identify with excessive behaviour. Rather, it is an all pervasive worldview, that influences the forming of our personalities in what motivates us, how we relate to others, including culture and religion. Neither Christians and churches nor their individual and collective identities are beyond its influence.

A world constructed in liturgy dominated by consumerism often draws from the current individualism, in which you (sg.) and I are the centre of the universe. Intercessions, sermons, sacramental actions, and other aspects of liturgical life focus only on the hopes and dreams of individuals.<sup>44</sup> This tendency is especially apparent in the United States, where churches devote a great deal of their attention and energy to what aspects of religion can satisfy the religious needs and wishes of individuals, how effective they are, and what combinations are the most attractive.<sup>45</sup> This approach is forthcoming to a culture that appreciates immediate gratification and constantly provokes individuals to explore whether what they have or are is sufficient, and what *products* may help them transform to some better version.<sup>46</sup> The result is that worshippers approach the liturgical assembly as a commodity, there to serve their needs. Therefore, many theologians seek sources for alternative scenarios.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. Conserving and Renewing Aspects of Liturgy

In the current ritual studies, rituals are considered to be instruments that support stability and continuity with the past as well as those initiating the process of change. Therefore one must distinguish

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<sup>43</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structure* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Benjamin Durheim, 'Converting Consumerism: A Liturgical-Ethical Application of Critical Realism,' *Religions* 10, no. 5 (2019): 338, doi: 10.3390/rel10050338.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy Brunk, 'Consumerism and the Liturgical Act of Worship,' *Horizons* 38 (2011): 54–74, 57–67.

<sup>47</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Rediscovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 8.

the conserving and renewing aspects of liturgy.<sup>48</sup> The problem emerges when one of them is pushed aside. The above-named examples of hierarchical distortion and distortion of the closed circle show that, in these cases, the second aspect is often missing. What can be helpful so that the Christian rituals also have this renewing dimension? Is it somehow interconnected with the current ritual form, with the 'ritual strategies'? I will show that there is a certain connection between ritual strategies and the conserving or renewing aspects of liturgy. Some ritual strategies are more appropriate for the stabilisation and keeping the *status quo*, some more fitting for the initiation of change in moral thinking.

Let us begin with an explanation of the terms ritual and ritual strategy. Ritual is a certain sort of human activity we find in all cultures, and which is the issue of explorations by scientists from various scientific fields. However, there is very little agreement among them about what ritual *is* and which characteristics are its intrinsic qualities. Some doubt that they even *exist*. Most often we encounter the claim that ritual is an action characterised through its formality, invariance and repetition. Roy Rappaport takes the term 'ritual' to denote 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers'.<sup>49</sup>

Catherine Bell, the American religious studies scholar, introduces an original approach when she defines ritual as a certain type of practice. Following the analysis of practice by Pierre Bourdieu, she concludes that ritual practice is always situational, strategic, embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing and able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world.<sup>50</sup> In other words, it always occurs in some specific context, is guided by practical or instrumental logic, and either supports the current worldview or changes it. The intrinsic feature of ritualisation is the fact that it uses various strategies for the intentional differentiation from other ways of acting within a certain culture.<sup>51</sup> As an example we might mention the Eucharist, the eating and drinking, which intentionally differs through its formalisation from common eating and drinking at home.

<sup>48</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>50</sup> Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory; Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81.

<sup>51</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory; Ritual Practice*, 90.

The concept of ritual as a strategic practice has important consequences. It points out that formality, invariance and repetition are not the intrinsic qualities of ritual, albeit they represent a frequent strategy of ritualisation. Strategies leading to the differentiation of the ritual action from another can sometimes be just the opposite. The informal and unique acting can intentionally be used by a group that intends to differentiate its action from another. Thus ritualisation can comprise the repetition of the old tradition as well as intentional radical innovations and improvisation.<sup>52</sup>

Bell explains it with the example of the Catholic mass:

The formal activities of gathering for a Catholic mass distinguish this 'meal' from daily eating activities, but the informality of a mass celebrated in a private home with a folk guitar and kitchen utensils is meant to set up another contrast (the spontaneous authentic celebration versus the formal and inauthentic mass) which the informal service expects to dominate. It is only necessary that the cultural context include some consensus concerning the opposition and relative values of personal sincerity and intimate participation vis-a-vis routinised and impersonal participation.<sup>53</sup>

Strategies of ritualisation are culturally specific.

What is the impact of using various ritual strategies such as formality and repetition or informality and uniqueness upon the ethical dimension of Christian rituals? The reflected experiences with liturgical practice in different churches show us that the traditional strategies of ritualisation – formality, invariance, and repetition – provide us only minimal space for actual and contextual expressions of a worldview. Those rituals working with less formal ritual strategies can be more sensitive to their situational context. Therefore, the liturgy should comprise not only the invariant and repeating liturgical elements (*ordinaria*), whose function is indisputable, as well as sufficient space for those changeable elements (*propria*), which enable reaction to the situational context, and as the case may be, space for improvisation. Interestingly, in the recently published *Book of Common Worship* of

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<sup>52</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 91.

<sup>53</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 92.

the Presbyterian Church in the USA (2018), we can even find some directions toward an improvised Eucharistic prayer.<sup>54</sup>

The largest space for the verbal expression of a discerning worldview is provided by the sermon. This is an occasion to connect biblical stories and images in order to see the actual local situation in broader contexts. The sermon has a liturgical quality; it does not stand as something separate outside the liturgy. As Frank Senn pointed out, 'it is itself a liturgical act whose purpose is to connect our stories with the stories of the people of God down through the ages, so that their faith or unbelief becomes our faith or illuminates our unbeliefs'.<sup>55</sup> Another opportunity are the intercessions, which enable worshippers to specifically express the experience of contrast (of injustice, poverty etc.). Add the newly formulated confession of sins, which enhances by language the actual understanding of sin and guilt. However, the use of all these liturgical elements for the deepening of our discerning worldview requires critical theological thought and, first of all, the ability to deal creatively with biblical stories, images, and symbols that help us see the situation from the perspective of Gospel.

## 5. Biblical Stories, Images, and Symbols as a Source of the Discerning Worldview

However, ritual strategies do not guarantee that the worldview proposed in ritual will correspond to the highest norm of liturgical ethics that we spoke about at the beginning of this study. It is possible that the traditional, highly formalised liturgy will fulfil this task better than the informal liturgy with guitar and improvised prayers. But it is also possible that it will be quite the other way around. What is the reason?

The significance and ethical impact of Christian rituals primarily depends upon their inner connection to the content of the biblical message. The essential element is their faithfulness to the Gospel. What is performed in Christian rituals is something what has the capacity to change our worldview as well as our life, but especially due to God's

<sup>54</sup> *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018). Moreover, this liturgical book now includes chapters dealing with both the social and cosmological dimension of the Christian existence. Here, we find chapters such as: 'Mission in the World,' 'Creation and Ecology,' 'Justice and Reconciliation,' and 'Inter-religious Events.'

<sup>55</sup> Senn, *Christian Liturgy*, 15.

activity. The liturgy should be conceived as an action in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our ritual can be helpful to that, but in some cases can also prevent it. Therefore it is necessary to establish an open liturgical critique, based on the biblical theology.<sup>56</sup>

The Protestant theologian Karl Barth claimed in his famous *Church Dogmatics* that whereas the modernity moves from its notions of the possible to the real, theology must move from what is real to what is possible.<sup>57</sup> The theologian starting with the reality of God's revelation trusts that what God intends is indeed possible and tries to understand it (*credo ut intelligam*). To understand the possibilities God opens to our life, we need both the Bible and our imagination. That means the ability to work with Bible in a creative way, so that it becomes the 'glasses' helping us to see clearly. Also the Catholic theologian Chauvet conceives the Bible as one of the tripod of Christian identity – next to the liturgy and ethics. The interpretation of Scripture, the celebration of sacraments and the ethical engagement are three inseparable areas where the symbolic mediating of God's holiness occurs, initiated by the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup>

However, shaping one's worldview in the perspective of Gospel is a slow process. According to Walter Brueggemann, people change neither due to doctrinal, cognitive argument, nor to the moral appeals. What they long for, is not new dogma, or new morals, but a new world, new self and new future: 'People in fact change by the offer of new models, images and pictures of how the pieces of life fit together – models, images and pictures that characteristically have the particularity of narrative to carry them.'<sup>59</sup>

In this process, the crucial role belongs to both memory and vision, to remembering the past and imagining the future, both bound in a creative way to the biblical stories and images. Thus the imaginative view of the past, inspired by the biblical image of creation, results in a new and grateful vision of the present. And in a similar way, the imaginative view of the future gives us hope in present, inspired by the biblical

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<sup>56</sup> See Tabita Landová, 'Liturgia semper reformanda. Teologické a antropologické výzvy pro evangelickou liturgiku,' *Teologická reflexe* 25, no. 1 (2019): 41–58.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik, I.2: Die Lehre von Gottes Wort: Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatik* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A. G., 1945), §13, 1–49. Engl. translation: *Church Dogmatics. Volume 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), § 13, 1–44).

<sup>58</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 174–176.

<sup>59</sup> See Brueggemann, *Text Under Negotiation*, 24.



visions of salvation, harmony, fulfilment and wholeness.<sup>60</sup> In both cases, imagination helps us to draw, imagine, conceive and live the world in another way than it appears when we observe it through our common and prevalent lenses. This imaginative view of past and future helps to change our present.

The resulting task for shaping Christian rituals is to support the prophetic imagination. That means the alternative visions of our life, our mutual relationships, and the social and political relations in the world. This utopian imagination, which is especially supported by the books of the prophets, Jesus's Sermon on the Mount or the Book of Revelation, helps us to see new possibilities. It shows, as Chauvet emphasises, that conversion and renewal are always possible, and thus helps us to struggle 'against the inevitable temptation to fall asleep in the security of a sacrificial functioning'.<sup>61</sup> Only with help of the prophetic imagination can the churches and their liturgies become a space where the thinking and acting are actually changed.

The exemplary case of how the true interpretation of Jesus words and practice can initiate changes in liturgy and transform the implied worldview, is the already mentioned ritual of washing feet in the liturgy of Green Thursday, as was practiced by Pope Francis in past years. Prior, as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires, he also washed the feet of women, albeit the rubrics in *Missale Romanum* prescribed, that the washing should be done to *virī selecti*. As a pope, Francis continued this practice and celebrated the ritual with the prisoners in the Roman prison for juveniles in 2013, where he also washed the feet of two women, one of them a Moslem. In 2016, Francis even washed the feet of the refugees in Castelnuovo di Porto near to Rome. Precisely in that year, the pope's adaptation of the ritual was liturgically and juridically anchored in the decree *In Missa in Cena Domini*. Here, the instruction *virī selecti* used in *Missale Romanum* from 2008 was replaced by the term *selecti* or *designati* from the people of God. The structure of this chosen group was further specified: there can be 'men and women, young and old, healthy and ill, clerics, initiated people, lay-people'.<sup>62</sup>

From today's view, it is possible to say that the intention to show the true sense of this ritual was successful. The ritual speaks to people as

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 29–56.

<sup>61</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 355.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted according to Kunetka, 'Obřad umývání nohou v liturgii Zeleného čtvrtku,' 77–78.

a token of the serving church and serving authority, which offers its service to all without difference.<sup>63</sup> The pope's approach is assessed as an 'evidence of creative dealing with the tradition, which is something living – especially in the area of liturgy, something that develops; that when it does not prove itself, perishes. Faithfulness always presupposes development, deepening, change.'<sup>64</sup>

The impact of this ritual change is not limited only to the discourse within the church, but also concerns the public.<sup>65</sup> Changes of (social) structures in liturgy can – though slowly and unpredictably – help protect liturgical-ethical engagement against the displays of consumerism, injustice, race and religious xenophobia, the negative attitude to refugees, etc.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the aspects of Christian rituals concerning the roles deserve special attention. Who prepares the communion table? Who distributes the bread and wine? Children helping prepare the communion table, lay-people helping to distribute are all comprehensible symbolic expressions of the idea of human equality in front of God's presence.

## Conclusion

What is the nature of certainty that our discernment between good and evil as enacted in ritual is correct? Can we even gain an absolute certainty? I attempted to show that Christian rituals have an essential role in forming Christian identity, as well for their ethical orientation in the world. Without doubt, Christian rituals provide the continuity for the journey of God's people. They ensure a corporeal assurance of God's mercy and forgiveness, help to orient believers in certain lived situations as they learn to see the world, including its ambiguities, in the perspective of God's promise. However, none of these 'certainties' guarantee that the moral discernment in ritual is always correct. The unshakeable certainty of ethical discernment in liturgy is neither

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<sup>63</sup> However, the standing of women in the Roman Catholic Church remains unequal to the standing of men. See Michaela Neulinger and Anni Findl-Ludescher, 'Lex Orandi – Lex Vivendi? Reflections on the Interaction between Gender Justice and Liturgy after Vatican II,' *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 9, no. 2 (2017), 231–257.

<sup>64</sup> Kunetka, 'Obřad umývání nohou v liturgii Zeleného čtvrtku,' 98.

<sup>65</sup> See Mózes Nóda, 'Religion, Liturgy and Ethics, at the Intersection Between Theory and Practice: The Revolution of Pope Francis,' *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16, no. 46 (2017), 17–35.

<sup>66</sup> Durheim, 'Converting Consumerism,' 13.

warranted by its ritual (changing or unchanging) form, nor by its relation to church doctrine or its roots in biblical tradition.

Christians must always be aware that their understanding depends upon their particular perspective among diverse perspectives. As Brueggemann emphasises, 'we voice a claim that rings true in our context, that applies authoritatively to our lived life. But it is a claim that is made in a pluralism where it has no formal privilege.'<sup>67</sup> Therefore, critical thinking guides us to the confession that our knowledge and judgement is always incomplete. Quoting the words of the apostle Paul, 'for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known' (1 Cor 13,12; ESV). At the same time, faith invites us to hope on an absolute, non-perspectival seeing – at the end of the time. Thus the nature of certainty in the ethical discernment can only be conceived as a certainty of faith which is grounded in the living passing on of the biblical tradition, in its faithful and contextual interpretation.

Faith is substantially interwoven with doubt, whose role is predominantly positive because it motivates us to the precision of our judgements. This coping with doubts and the consciousness of our limits leads to humility. Humility should be a stable aspect of every Christian ritual – as the basic attitude of all its performers and participants, and liturgically enacted in the prayers for the gift of Holy Spirit and the ability to hear and see.

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<sup>67</sup> Brueggemann, *Text Under Negotiation*, 9.