

Liturgy, Spirituality, and Liturgical Spirituality: Definitions

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This short article (bearing in mind constraints of space) attempts to describe three terms: liturgy, spirituality, and liturgical spirituality. The descriptions are predominately from a Christian perspective.

Liturgy

Liturgy is initiated by God on humankind's behalf.¹ "At the heart of liturgy", writes Schaefer, "God offers the gift of self to human beings through the agency of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and anoints them with the Spirit of holiness".² All liturgy is intrinsically trinitarian – involving the work of Jesus Christ who prays to God on behalf of the world, and the Spirit of God who empowers persons with new life.³ Such liturgy, with its trinitarian basis, recognizes that all creation has come from "a three-personed God, who maintains it in being and nurtures it."⁴ Accordingly, invoking the names of God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit plays an important part in the liturgy.⁵ The purpose of liturgy is to enable humans to enter into a relationship with the divine Mystery who ever works for, with, and in humans (whether acknowledged or not).⁶

¹ M. M. Schaefer, "Trinity: Source and Goal of Liturgy, Spirituality, Life", *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (Spring 1995): 67 and Odo Casel, "Mystery and Liturgy", in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. W. V. Dwight (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) 31. Casel places the words "mystery" and "liturgy" side by side. He then contrasts the two as follows: "Mystery means the heart of the action, that is to say, the redeeming work of the risen Lord, through the sacred actions he has appointed; liturgy . . . means rather the action of the church in conjunction with this saving action of Christ's." He goes on to state that we can "characterize mystery as more the act of the bridegroom, and liturgy the act of the bride, without thereby making too great a division".

² *Ibid.*, 67.

³ *Ibid.*, 66; K. Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 235. Irwin states that "the important place of Christ in liturgical prayer should be underscored and emphasized when understanding the important place of the Trinity in the liturgy."

⁴ Schaefer, "Trinity", 68.

⁵ Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality*, 231.

⁶ Schaefer, "Trinity", 67.

Liturgy has a two-fold function in the community of faith, the Church – “to *constitute* the Church and to *express* the Church”.⁷ In this context, liturgy may be described as consisting of four essential actions: gathering, storytelling, nurturing, and missioning⁸ – in other words, the faith community gathers, listens, shares, and goes forth to do justice in the world, all empowered by the Spirit.⁹ From this flows the fact that liturgy and life are inseparably linked.¹⁰ It means that the spirit that finds expression in liturgy ought to continue the work of converting one into Christ’s image.¹¹ In sum, liturgy celebrates the deepest reality of the life of faith¹² – or, as Casel notes, “it is the grace-filled reality, the redemption itself”.¹³

Spirituality

Spirituality is the experience of one’s relationship with God in faith (coming to know God), and the ways in which one lives out that faith (one’s response to God, including the prayer and work performed in faith).¹⁴ Spirituality may also be described as the way one responds to the Spirit of God, both in one’s prayer and actions.¹⁵ Griffith adds that “the word ‘spirituality’ can be traced to the letters of Paul where he uses the Greek term *pneuma* to

⁷ I. H. Dalmais, “The Liturgy as Celebration”, in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. W. V. Dwight (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 26.

⁸ M. E. Moynahan, “The Disclosive Actions of Liturgical Spirituality”, *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (Spring 1995): 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Schaefer, “Trinity”, 68. One acknowledges and thanks God for life and love in and through Christ Jesus (Irwin, *Liturgy, Prayer and Spirituality*, 224).

¹³ Casel, “Mystery and Liturgy”, 30. David W. Fagerberg describes ten theological characteristics of liturgy – liturgy is corporate, cosmological, eschatological, Christological and pneumatological, traditional, apostolic, hierarchical, mystical, symbolic, and iconic (D. W. Fagerberg, “A Theology of Liturgy”, *Liturgical Ministry* 14 [Fall 2005]: 169-179).

¹⁴ Moynahan, “The Disclosive Actions of Liturgical Spirituality”, 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

signal a life lived in harmony with God's spirit".¹⁶ Sheldrake states that spirituality "is the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, and within the community of believers".¹⁷ Simply put, spirituality is that which brings a person to inner transformation.¹⁸ Since Christian spirituality is formed within the community of the Church,¹⁹ in that context one can conclude with Ford who writes that "a [fully] *lived* liturgy is all the spirituality one needs".²⁰

Liturgical Spirituality

If both liturgy and spirituality involve a way of life, then liturgical spirituality also implies a way of living.²¹ "This way of life", writes Zimmerman, "is an ongoing interpretation of the meaning the Paschal Mystery for our everyday living".²² Liturgical spirituality, then, is a way of life shaped by the Paschal Mystery.²³ The term "paschal mystery", the proclamation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is significant.²⁴ In Christ's ministry and teaching, and particularly in his dying and rising, he reveals a pattern of

¹⁶ C. M. Griffith, "What Is Spirituality?", in *Spirituality for the 21st Century: Experiencing God in the Catholic Tradition*, ed. R. W. Miller II (Missouri: Ligouri, 2006), 7. Griffith adds that "spirituality implies a capacity to live in alignment with the Spirit of God".

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ Moynahan, "The Disclosive Actions of Liturgical Spirituality", 69.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ P. F. Ford, "Lived Liturgy, First Spirituality", *Liturgical Ministry* 10 (Fall 2001): 186,193.

²¹ Moynahan, "The Disclosive Actions of Liturgical Spirituality", 70. Dallen states that in liturgical spirituality, "life and liturgy must coincide" (J. Dallen, "Liturgical Spirituality: Living What We Sing About", *Liturgical Ministry* 4 [Spring 1995]: 49.).

²² *Ibid.*, 70. Dallen adds a further insight when he states that "liturgical spirituality not only flows from and leads to the liturgy, it is also formed by the spirit of the liturgy. It is communal in nature, founded on Scripture, focused on praise and thanksgiving, and oriented to action in the world to establish the right relationships that are rehearsed in celebration". (Dallen, "Liturgical Spirituality, 59.)

²³ *Ibid.* Dallen gives a fuller definition of liturgical spirituality when he writes that it "may be defined as a spirituality formed, informed, and oriented by communal ritual participation in the Paschal Mystery" (Dallen, "Liturgical Spirituality, 49).

²⁴ R. R. Gaillardetz, "The Life of Grace", in *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 73.

living that offers the possibility of salvation.²⁵ From this discussion, liturgical spirituality is a way of life that accepts its calling by Christ,

. . . often against our instincts, to submit to a life of vulnerability in which we risk pain and suffering in a life of love and compassion. We do this knowing that it is only through that willingness to feel pain, to suffer, to know real loss, that we can know delight, gratitude, and the joy of life that the Spirit offers us.²⁶

In sum, and in the words of Witvliet, liturgical spirituality “is all about conversion, the daily dying and rising with Christ that constantly hones, shapes, and re-converts us to the image of Christ more faithfully”.²⁷

In closing, Christian spirituality and liturgy need to be accurately informed about three bedrock concepts: liturgy, spirituality, and liturgical spirituality – a task that this short article has aspired to do.

²⁵ Ibid., 74. Gaillardetz further notes that “this life-and-death pattern becomes for us a saving pedagogy. The Gospel of John captures its essence” in John 12:24-26: “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me” (NIV).

²⁶ Ibid., 74-75.

²⁷ J. D. Witvliet, “Liturgy as God’s Language School”, *Pastoral Music* (April-May, 2007): 23.

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