

Consensus

Volume 26

Issue 1 *The Baptismal Journey: Adventures on the River of Life*

Article 26

5-1-2000

Liturgical spirituality

Donald C. Nevile

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Nevile, Donald C. (2000) "Liturgical spirituality," *Consensus*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 26.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol26/iss1/26>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

a promising section of practical importance, yet remains underdeveloped.

Stylistically, the book is well researched, well written and thus, easy to follow. Much of this is due to Resner's consistent repetition. In every chapter he announces what he is going to say, he says it, and then he repeats what he has said. You cannot miss his arguments. Strangely, the book ends with a quirky insult to theological schools for following cultural values rather than the cross' values in training preachers. No proof or further explanation is given. This is a glaring blip in an otherwise well reasoned and well documented book. The strength of *Preacher and Cross* is its ability to debate and provide an answer to the theoretical issue of the importance of *ethos* in preaching. Its weakness is that it travels too long on the theoretical highway and doesn't take enough off ramps to visit the practical concerns of local church pastors.

Mike Rattee
Emmanuel Bible College
Kitchener, Ontario

Liturgical Spirituality

Philip Pfatteicher

Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1997
xii + 292 pages, \$33.95

The quest for "spirituality" is very much with and among us today. This may well be the finest book on spirituality from a Lutheran prospective written in our time. Pfatteicher, well known from his other writings on liturgy and worship, defines his term liturgical spirituality as "that distinctive interior life of the spirit that is formed and nurtured by the church's liturgy" (ix). His topic, then, is "the spiritual life as formed by the liturgy" (ibid). He proposes to tell how the principal symbols of Christian liturgy are experienced spiritually by a congregation.

He begins by defining the spiritual life. It is first of all gift and response, and not our work. His view of spirituality is then theocentric. He also stresses the corporate nature of Christian faith: It is God with us, and it is communal. It is embodied, and in this sense not especially "spiritual" as we normally think of the word. It transforms us, to make us more like God. "Spirituality then is prayer plus love plus devotedness. It is, in the words of Brother Lawrence, 'the practise of the presence of God', the way one does one's religion. It is interpreting the world according to one's innermost life and intimate and ultimate concern. It is an everyday activity, the way one goes about daily life...but that is rooted and focused in the intersection of time and eternity that we call worship...God's service of us and our response in our service of God" (10-11).

This formation of the Christian spirit in worship occurs through seven means, to each of which he devotes a chapter, and each of which he perceives to hallow a different dimension of life: the daily office, the Easter Vigil, the Christian year, architecture, the Eucharist, hymns, and Holy Baptism. Liturgy is the use and study of *text*, but also of *symbol*: hence his treatment of these seven areas which, rather than limiting us, stretch our spiritual lives.

The daily office hallows time and mediates to us the symbols of light and darkness, night and day, our words and God's Word, speech and silence. On the use of silence in the liturgy he remarks that "it is a corporate experience that, perhaps surprisingly, binds those who share it more deeply than their common recitation of words can do" (46).

He uses the Easter Vigil, which hallows memory, as an anchor for exploring the spirituality of resurrection and Easter. He relates it to the experience of moon, spring, time as flexible, silence, darkness and light, emptiness, Scripture, and water.

Through the Christian year, the hallowing of the seasons, we resonate with the world of nature. The Christian year uses this to re-appropriate the life of Christ, not in a historic sense but rather rhythmically, "dense, and close-packed" (109). This is governed by a few simple symbols and archetypes of pilgrimage. The year is a cycle that is going somewhere. In this chapter, he makes an interesting and rather convincing case for beginning the Christian year not with Advent, but with Ash Wednesday.

Through architecture, the hallowing of space, he sees also the hallowing of life. He uses Eliade's concept of the church building as a temple which becomes the threshold to another world, drawing also on the literary images of Alice and the Looking Glass, and the wardrobe as the threshold to C. S. Lewis' Narnia. There is a wonderful description here of Gothic faith, which produced the great 12th and 13th century French cathedrals. He defends the 19th century Gothic revival movement in architecture as authentic, and includes a moving account of the destruction of the Pittsburgh neo-gothic church, St. Peter's, in 1990. He develops a convincing dialectic between church as holy place and as house of the faithful with their activities.

His discussion of the Eucharist is subtitled hallowing sustenance. Holy Communion, he observes, is tied to the 7-day week, which is a rather artificial construct. He stresses the idea of journey and movement, taking us through the eight actions of Eucharist: prepare, assemble, hear the Word, intercede, offer self and gifts, give thanks, eat and drink, depart. These are an essential part of the human spiritual need for sustenance, "food for the journey".

He sees hymnody as the challenge of hallowing song. This is an especially tough spiritual move for us today, since corporate song is so strange to us. There

are two purposes behind hymnody: to give us voice, and to instruct. As might be expected of an English teacher, he defends “text-only” printing of hymns, so that one may see the shape of the poetry, and gives several examples of symbolically-shaped hymns. (For example, “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright”, LBW #76, the verses of which, when printed in a centered-fashion are shaped like chalices.) He relates hymn singing to our spiritual control over sound and breath, again a physical spirituality. Hymns are also for him a signpost in the church pointing to the unity of past and present faith expressions. Hymns bind us together as nothing else in liturgy does.

Pfatteicher is plainly a lover of hymns. He quotes many from our *Lutheran Book of Worship*. But just as many citations are drawn from the hymnbooks of other churches – and a great many from our earlier *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958), perhaps a comment on the loss of Christian poetry which occurs when a church changes hymnbooks!

Finally Holy Baptism is the way we hallow life and death. This may seem an odd place to deal with baptism, at the end of the book. But Pfatteicher begins his discussion by focussing on the aspect of death in baptism: water as the threat of drowning, the sea as the most profound symbol of our transitoriness. For him, the image of bath and washing is simply too weak to carry the theological freight of baptism. So baptism becomes the journey toward death.

Pfatteicher celebrates the vast and intricate complexity and richness of Christian faith and liturgy. This is not a book for the univocal! It is a persuasive book, gently prodding us toward a liturgical spirituality, and occasionally startling us. Much of the content grows out of his other writings on liturgy, especially the co-authored and much-used “Manual on the Liturgy”, now over twenty years old. The student of Lutheran liturgy in our time will find many echoes here of this “Manual”.

Nor is it a book for those who maintain an attitude of *scriptura sola*. Pfatteicher is an English teacher, and draws on the poetry, literature, and hymnody of his field. He also crosses over easily into the territory of the history of religions, quoting Eliade, James Frazer, Joseph Campbell and Rudolf Otto frequently. He writes poetically and eloquently, as befits a professor of English.

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Will his theory of spirituality “work”? And can it sit close with our Lutheran perspective on the Christian life? I think so. His spirituality is not the inward-focussing solipsism of historic Pietism and current evangelical spirituality, but outward, focussing on the ancient archetypal symbols, in their physical, ritual, and cultural manifestations. Moreover, as many of us believe, even God used these archetypes and symbols when he communicated to us in Scripture! He presents a physical, sacramental, embodied, “hands-on” spirituality. It focuses on *things*, such as the paschal candle, the word alleluia, the lenten pilgrimage, and so on. Here the Christian life

happens not so much *inside* as *outside*, a welcome contrast to so much of the inward-looking spirituality being marketed today. Jesus is not simply a figure in a book, or in the imagination, but one actually present to us in, with, and under ritual.

Part of the fun of reading Pfatteicher is in the trivia. He makes interesting comments on the appropriate use of odd numbers of prayers in liturgy (25), and strikes a blow for integrity in his remarks on the inappropriateness of fake organ pipes in the sanctuary! The book contains one oversight, of interest to readers of this journal. In his preface, Pfatteicher records his gratitude to "the first national Liturgical Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, held on the campus of the University of Manitoba in July 1982" (xi). If memory serves me rightly, this was not a conference of the ELCIC, but of that now-defunct but once cutting-edge society, CLAW, the Canadian Lutheran Association for Worship!

Don Nevile

Highwood Lutheran Church

Calgary, Alberta

The Mutuality of Care

Roy Herndon SteinhoffSmith

St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999

224 pages, \$33.50 Softcover

SteinhoffSmith pulls, out of experience, the opportunity for us to see and observe our tendency as care givers to participate in acts of condescension rather than mutuality. He rightfully acknowledges how difficult it is for many of us to identify this esteem-deflating stance. He goes so far as to reveal an analysis of his own experiences and learnings.

SteinhoffSmith begins his book by using his experiences in a mission group to share his insight. The people he was supposedly "serving" in this group that fed the poor, were themselves creating a community of mutuality. They did not experience themselves as receiving from the leaders of the group, but receiving from everyone in the group, as well as contributing to everyone in the group. Many of the "poor" themselves brought food to share. He began to learn that caring from a stance of power or authority was not really care.

He explores further in his book that pastoral care is very often seen as a "professional skill" of the ordained or specially trained church worker, rather than the attribute of an entire Christian community. This professionalizing of pastoral care misses out on the talents and resources of those around us. It also brings pain to those whose contributions are not acknowledged for lack of recognizing