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Liturgy and Creation
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Liturgy and Creation

We worship in the created world, as part of creation, using created signs and symbols. We thank God for the goodness of creation, and commit ourselves to honor and respect creation.
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Liturgy and Creation

Audrey Whitson

The author of the articles on liturgy and creation in this issue of the Bulletin is a native of Alberta. She received a degree in social work from the University of Calgary, and a master's from the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, California, where she studied at the Franciscan School of Theology. She has written on ministry, social justice, spirituality and culture. She now lives in Edmonton, Alberta, where she teaches at St. Joseph's College and facilitates retreats and workshops.

Emphases added to the text (in italics) are the writer's.

The ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity. . .

Pope John Paul II

Dear sisters and brothers, we write with a sense of urgency. The earth is in peril. Our only home is in plain jeopardy.

World Council of Churches

Today humanity is at a crossroads. Having read the signs of the times, we can either ignore the harm we see and witness further damage, or we can take up our responsibilities to the creator and creation with renewed courage and commitment.

U. S. Bishops

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. . . Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.

Isaiah 24.5-6a

Ecological crisis: By all accounts we are facing the possibility of ecological catastrophe. Daily we hear accounts of the effects of environmental pollution, ozone depletion and global warming. In many communities across Canada, recycling programs have sprung up in response to a new awareness of the importance of natural creation and its preservation. Protest actions like those at Clayoquot Sound on Vancouver Island are becoming more frequent as Canadians sense an urgency about the ecological crisis, a crisis they believe has moral contours.

1 John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation." World Day of Prayer for Peace, January 1, 1990, n 10
Canadian perspective: As a people dominated by our landscape, Canadians are in a privileged position to speak about the sacred character of creation and the spiritual gifts of the wilderness. We know its beauty and its extremes perhaps more intimately than any other people in the world. As a country of 27 million people surrounded by a vast expanse of earth, large portions of it yet unspoiled and unpopulated, we have never been able to completely separate ourselves from its forces. Ours is a consciousness shaped by the land.

Loss of awareness: Yet in our post-modern age, many people have lost touch with their dependence on the land. They forget the deep biblical intuition that we come from the earth, that we are one with the earth and the skies, that we are evolved from stardust.

Action needed: Most commentators on the issue admit that many actions will be needed to remedy the contemporary ecological crisis. The challenge is complex, the task unprecedented.

To be stewards: Church leaders of all traditions have challenged scientists, environmentalists, economists, educators, parents, citizens, theologians, business leaders, politicians, and all Christians to act, as one source described it, as “genuine stewards of nature and thereby co-creators of a new human world.” They caution, “this will require both new attitudes and new actions.” The U. S. bishops call for the development of “an ecological spirituality.” The World Council of Churches delegation at the Earth Summit in May of 1992 likewise encouraged the elaboration of an eco-centered theology of creation which emphasizes God’s spirit in creation (Genesis 1.2; Psalm 104), and human beings as an integral part of nature.

Liturgy is important: It is no surprise then, that many church leaders include liturgy as an important means by which “new attitudes and new actions” might be realized, by which an ecologically conscious spirituality and parallel theology might be born.

We also urge celebrants and liturgy committees to incorporate themes into prayer and worship which emphasize our responsibility to protect all of God’s creation and to organize prayerful celebrations of creation on feast days honoring St. Francis and St. Isidore.

First theology: Christians traditionally have viewed liturgy as the first source of theology. If that is true, then it is the place we first form our views about the world and the relationships which hold that world together: human, cosmic and divine. In this way it often acts as the wellspring of spirituality for the Christian, the font and basis of “second” or philosophical theology.

What can our liturgy teach us about an ecological spirituality? What does it have to say to a theology that is conscious of creation? Most obvious is the fact that at the root of many of our rituals – sacramental rites, blessings, benedictions,

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4 “Renewing the Earth,” V; see also Searching for the New Heavens, 28-43; Peace with God the Creator, nn 8-16
5 “Renewing the Earth,” V
6 Ibid.
7 Searching for the New Heavens, 31
8 “Renewing the Earth,” V
special masses and prayers – is some kind of reference to the presence of the sacred in creation. In fact not only would our sacraments look barren without their earthly base, we would not have sacraments at all without the natural world.

In this issue of the Bulletin we will first consider, briefly, the biblical foundations for contemporary concerns regarding creation, the way in which creation has been important in the history of Christian liturgy and spirituality, and the interrelationships of ecology, liturgy and spirituality.

With such basic information and principles in mind, we will then consider creation and the liturgical year, the sacraments, and sacramentals, blessings and other prayers, and finally, the environment of worship.

In the articles that follow several examples of worship with creation in mind are presented. I urge you to pray with these texts as you would pray them in a worship setting, for indeed we are not alone. There is always a "single sacred community" surrounding us at every moment of our existence: sunlight, darkness, wind, green grass, frozen ground, trees in every season, the fruits of things growing – and the entire human community.

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Selected Reading


John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*. World Day of Prayer for Peace, January 1, 1990 (This has been reprinted by the Calgary Separate School System, with an introductory letter by Bishop Paul O'Byrne)

Scott McCarthy, *Celebrating the Earth* (San Jose: Resource Publications 1991)

Sean McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1990)


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The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. . . .
Psalm 24.1

**Be with creation:** Some years ago I led a retreat with a group of youth in which we explored connections between creation and spirituality. Several participants were shocked when I suggested they leave their bibles in their rooms and spend several hours one afternoon to just be with creation. In an exercise modelled after one by Maria Harris,¹ I asked them to discover the story of creation through one of its many manifestations: a rock, a feather, a leaf; and in that discovery to learn something of their own journey and their understanding of the Creator. At first, several were uneasy. One admitted, “I know they say that St. Francis used to talk to the birds and the wolves but I don’t know, did they really mean it?”

**Communicating with nature:** Francis, with his gift of profound poverty, a poverty very much in touch with the power of the earth, exhorted his nonhuman brothers and sisters — air, water, fire, sun, moon, earth and even “Sister bodily death” — to praise God along with him. He acted in concert with the intuition of the psalmist, that all the voices of nature join in the chorus of human worship to the One Living God — see Psalms 148, 96, 97, 103, 145, 150.² It is a tradition and a chorus we find echoed in the book of Revelation.

I, John, looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, all that is in them, singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ (Revelation 5.11, 13)

**Genesis:** This sense of a grand liturgy surrounding and involving creation has its origin in the opening verses of Genesis. Here in the priestly creation account, each new work is greeted with the litany, “And God saw that it was good.” Over and over again, “God saw that it was good.” Finally, after all the labor of creating, after the gift of water and sky, light and darkness, plants and animals, and human beings, “God saw everything that God had made and indeed, it was very good.” Good and, indeed, very good; a naming and a chorus; a proclamation and a response: this is the stuff of high liturgy.³

**Noah:** The cosmic celebration continues into Noah’s time, with the marking of the first covenant (Genesis 9.8-17). In this covenant God seeks to restore mutual relationships not only with humankind but with all living creatures: birds and animals, fishes and plants, indeed, with the earth itself. God chooses a sign in nature, a work of beauty to recall the promise, to speak the vision:

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¹ Maria Harris, *Women and Teaching* (New York: Paulist 1988) 41-42
² Sean McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1990) 147-148
God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make *between me and you and every living creature that is with you*, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. . . *between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.* (Genesis 9.12-13, 15b)

**Hosea:** The prophecy of Hosea reverberates with a similar longing and hope for a restored covenant that is universal in scope. Ecological harmony, peace and justice walk hand in hand:

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. (Hosea 2.18)

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**The Gospels**

**The Incarnation** brings that ancient hope much nearer to fulfilment. The gospel of John opens with this proclamation: "*In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became flesh and lived among us*" (John 1.1, 14). "Flesh" is an important word here. Some theologians would argue that this text tells us that God became not just human, but one with all flesh, all living beings, forming a new covenant with all of creation.

**Dwelling with us:** Now we see the significance of the incarnation so appropriately put in some translations of John’s gospel: "The Word *pitched his tent among us*" (Jerusalem Bible); "the Word . . . *dwelt among us*" (New American Bible). In Christ our home has become God’s home, in life and even in death.

**God with us:** It is this becoming flesh, this redemption in the flesh, this belief in the resurrection of the body, this belief in the Body and Blood of Jesus the Christ in the Eucharist, this incarnational, bodily testament to faith that distinguishes Christian faith from all others. It is this singular faith *in the body* which makes the Christian Church long to be one, holy, apostolic and catholic – the universal church. It is this faith in Emmanuel, God-with-us that attempts to speak Word through the cultures, the landscapes, the peoples, the colors, which it encounters *in the flesh*. It is this church enfleshed which prefigures an inclusive worship, inclusive of all five senses: smell, taste, touch, voice, sight; inclusive of all the elements of life: fire, water, earth, air. It is this sacramentality which holds the hope for a more ecologically conscious church and world in our own age.

**Jesus and nature:** In his ministry, Jesus exhibited what one theologian calls a "deep withness," a deep consciousness of his *incarnation*, a deep inclusivity.

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5 Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co. 1983) 92
The very elements heralded his coming: the star over the place where he was born; the stones along his final ceremonial procession into Jerusalem. "I tell you, if these [people] were silent, the stones would shout out!" (Luke 19.40) Jesus himself called upon the forces of nature both in his miracles and his teaching. He quieted storms and cursed fig trees. He scooped up earth, made a paste with his own spittle and healed a blind man. He contemplated the ways of the sparrows and the lilies and shared their wisdom in his preaching. He sought out the wilderness whenever he needed rest and prayer. As a Jew, Jesus understood the Jewish berakah – blessing – the blessing of creation, the blessing of bodies. 

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**Creation in Paul**

**God the creator:** At the outset of his preaching, Paul the apostle, a diaspora Jew, weds this Jewish sense of berakah with popular Hellenistic culture. What emerges is a sense of the world as the body of God. 

The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. . . . For 'In him we live and move and have our being,' as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' (Acts 17.28)

**Cosmic Christ:** Paul deepens this sense of the berakah of body in his letters to the new churches. In the risen Christ, our bodies and our worshipping communities take on hope-filled meaning. We become "temples" of the Holy Spirit, the locus of supreme worship (1 Corinthians 6.19). We become "the body of Christ" the church, (1 Corinthians 12.27) "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1.23). Far from an earth-bound Christ or a heaven-bound Savior, the cosmic Christ of Paul reaches across all dimensions. In this Christ, all is created; all is redeemed. Earth and heaven, human and divine, material and spiritual come together.

. . . for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. . . . For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, on earth or in heaven, by making peace with the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1.15-17, 19-20)

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\(^7\) See McFague, *The Body of God*, for the most extensive treatment of this point to date.

The earth our home: In the risen Christ, the very earth becomes our \textit{oikos}, our home, our household, our place of gathering, our ecosystem. All creation is destined for redemption in the living One. As translated by Denis Edwards, a key passage of John's gospel reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
For God so loved the \textit{cosmos} that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the \textit{cosmos}, not to condemn the \textit{cosmos}, but that the \textit{cosmos} might be saved through him. (John 3.16-17)
\end{quote}

Christ's death and resurrection hold the promise for new life across the spectrum of species and elements:

\begin{quote}
For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; in hope that creation itself will be set free. . . . We know that the whole of creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only creation but we ourselves. (Romans 8.19-23)
\end{quote}

The Risen Christ: At the center of our world and our ecosystem crisis is the body of Christ. It is the risen body of Christ we seek.

\begin{quote}
Christ is the end-point of evolution, even the natural evolution, of all beings; and therefore evolution is holy.\footnote{Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{Hymn of the Universe}, 133}
\end{quote}

\footnote{Edwards, \textit{Jesus and the Cosmos}, 64}
Creation and the Christian Tradition

The Christian tradition has never lost sight of creation, though it has been more central in the lives and spirituality of some persons than of others.

The Desert Monks

During the third to sixth centuries, men and women sought the solitude and friendship of the deserts of Egypt and Sinai. The fruits of their spiritual journey had a profound impact on both liturgical prayer and spirituality.

The records of the Spanish pilgrim Egeria tell us that small churches were built and sacred sites marked all over the desert, especially at places where events of the Exodus were thought to have occurred. The eucharist was celebrated in the barren desert, at springs, in gardens, on mountain tops, and on rocky slopes, all places where monks and nuns lived and prayed daily. When pilgrims such as Egeria came, the desert fathers and mothers gave fruits and vegetables grown laboriously there in the wilderness; these gifts were called “blessings.”

The book of nature: These desert dwellers eschewed most of the trappings of sophistication, including books, in some cases even to the point of illiteracy. They cautioned against the pride of human knowledge and instead sought the learning of God. When that great “father of monks,” Anthony was asked how he managed without the “comfort of books,” he answered quite handily:

My book, philosopher, is the nature of created things, and as often as I have a mind to read the words of God, it is at my hands.

Remembrance of the Creator: Teresa of Avila shared similar sentiments in her advice to those left unhelped by discursive methods of prayer. She preferred spiritual reading and among her list recommended a different sort of book for recollection:

It also helped me to look at fields, or water or flowers. In these I found a remembrance of the Creator. I mean that they awakened me and recollected me and served as a book and reminded me of my ingratitude and sins.

Relationship with birds and animals: Research ecologist Susan Power Bratton cites several incidents in the stories of the Desert Fathers in which human cooperation with

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winged, two legged and four legged creatures was paramount. In her comprehensive analysis of the Desert writings she finds that many of the legendary miracles recorded take as their models stories already found in sacred scripture. She cites, for example, references to Elijah’s dependence on the ravens during his refuge in the desert (1 Kings 17.1-6), allusions to the harmonious animal-human relations anticipated at the end of time (Isaiah 11.6-7; 43.20), accounts of lions protecting prophets (Daniel 6.17-24), and the use of animals as moral models and agents of revelation (1 Samuel 6.7-12; Matthew 17.24-27).4

**Nature a friend and companion:** The monks did indeed enjoy friendships with male and female animals and encountered kindness in mother lions and hyaenas. “Nature,” discovers Bratton, “is sometimes represented as harsh, but rarely as demonic.”5 Instead, nature is most often friend and companion, source of solitude and ultimately source of relationship with the Creator. “Early monasticism,” she concludes, “was, if anything, anti-urban.”5 At the same time she does not deny the body-negating effects of neoplatonism whose principles of dualism already co-existed among the early Desert dwellers alongside those of Hebrew thought on the goodness of creation.

**The meaning of creation:** Evagrius, another Desert Father, whose writings influenced monasticism even into our own century,7 described contemplation on nature as an essential step in the spiritual life:

> Christianity is the dogma of Christ our Saviour. It is composed of **praktike**, of the contemplation of the physical world and of the contemplation of God.8

He went on to explain:

> We pursue... the inner meanings of what is created, for the sake of attaining to the Lord who has created them.9

**Thomas Merton’s writing** and contemplation were deeply influenced by his reading of Evagrius and the Desert Dwellers.10

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**Benedictine Monasticism**

**An alternative economy:** Liturgical prayer of the Middle Ages, built on these desert beginnings, developed, expanded and flourished in the West under Benedictine monasticism and its later affiliates. Farming vast communal estates, monasticism represented an alternative and at the same time parallel economy to the feudal system of the time. Later reformers like the Cistercians would seek out vast tracts of uncultivated wilderness not only for its poverty but also its natural beauty.

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5 Ibid., 44
6 Ibid., 42
8 Ibid., n 1
9 Ibid., n 51
Presence of God in creation: Our liturgical tradition today is in large degree a product-of-this rural Benedictine life, whose monastic spirituality was-centered on-the rhythms of planting and harvest, summer and winter, darkness and light. The monks shaped their days according to a conscious dependence on the land and the providence of a just Creator, believing all creation to be transparent to the presence of God. The author of the Rule of St. Benedict declares, “We believe that God is everywhere...” (ch. 19), and as firmly, “... we must believe God is present even in our bodily desires” (ch. 7).

The work of God: Prayer was centered around the hours of the day, the week, and the seasons of the year. The opus dei – the work of God – was balanced with needs for nourishment, rest and work.

From Easter to Pentecost the brothers shall have dinner at the sixth hour and supper at night. From Pentecost through the summer the monks ought to fast until the ninth hour on Wednesdays and Fridays, provided that there is no field work and that the heat is not too great. (ch. 41)

Nature and human needs: Point and counterpoint, Benedict maintained an easy balance between opus dei, natural elements and human need:

From Easter until November first the hour for Matins should be arranged so that, after a very short break for going to the toilet, Lauds, which ought to be said at daybreak, may follow immediately. (ch. 8)

The Rule was flexible, blending seasons of time with seasons of faith:

From September fourteenth until Lent, dinner will be at the ninth hour. From Lent until Easter they shall dine in the evening.

Vespers should be timed so that the evening meal will be finished in daylight. No matter what [whether there be one meal or two], all meals should be finished in daylight. (ch. 41)

For the feast with the Bridegroom is a feast in light of day.

They sought reasonable compromise between the work of God, bodily needs and culture:

We read that wine is not for monks, but in our times they cannot accept this. Let us therefore agree on this limit at least... (ch. 40)

And finally, there was an equilibrium between the Rule, the work of the community and bodily needs:

If the monks have worked harder than usual, the abbot shall decree, if he thinks it wise, an increase in the ration. (ch. 40)

The Work of God

Psalm 66: Given the careful integration of Benedictine life and worship, all Lauds and thus all mornings began with Psalm 66, psalmody which harkens the very earth to praise the Creator:

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
Sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise.

Praise God! Imagine yourself as a monk whose rising coincided with the rising of the sun. Would you indeed rise with an eagerness to praise the Creator of all? As a Christian, consider how meaningful Psalm 66 would be on your day of rest from the work of co-creation. This psalm continues:

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!... All the earth worships you, they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Come and see what God has done:

Here the psalm turns from blessing to saving, to redemption and a creation redeemed:

He is awesome in his deeds...
He turned the sea into dry land...

The psalmist recalls the Exodus, that first passage from slavery into freedom, and all the elements are named or their presence implied: "sea" (water), "dry land," "he did not let our feet slip" (earth), "we went through fire and through water," "my lips uttered" (breath), "the smoke of the sacrifice (air)". Redemption in the Hebrew experience is indeed bodily, indeed earth-defined.

Psalm 50: According to the ancient Rule, on Sundays Psalm 50 follows Psalm 66 (ch. 12). Again the earth is invoked:

The mighty one, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.
Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

Song of the three children: The Rule continues along its Sunday course with Psalms 117 and 62, the Benedicite (Daniel 3.52 ff.) and the "Laudes" (Psalms 148-150), with much of the last two elements preserved in the contemporary order of the Liturgy of the Hours. So central is creation to the redemptive story that, for example, excerpts from The Canticle of the Three Children stream through all four Sundays of Ordinary Time.

Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord.
Praise and exalt him forever.
Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord.
You heavens, bless the Lord.
All you waters above the heavens, bless the Lord.
All you hosts of the Lord, bless the Lord.
Sun and moon, bless the Lord.
Stars of heaven, bless the Lord.
Every shower and dew, bless the Lord.
All you winds, bless the Lord.
Fire and heat, bless the Lord.
Cold and chill, bless the Lord.
Dew and rain, bless the Lord.
Frost and chill, bless the Lord.
Ice and snow, bless the Lord.
Nights and days, bless the Lord.
Light and darkness, bless the Lord.
Lightnings and clouds, bless the Lord.
Let the earth bless the Lord.
Mountains and hills, bless the Lord.
Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord.
You springs, bless the Lord.
Seas and dolphins and all water creatures, bless the Lord.
All you birds of the air, bless the Lord.
All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord.
You children of humanity, bless the Lord.

Psalm 93: This promise of a renewed creation, looked for on the Lord's Day, is preserved in the church's contemporary though shortened design of the texts for Morning Prayer. Following the invitatory, Psalm 95, "Come let us sing and shout with joy to the Rock who saves us," blessing and saving theology inextricably intertwined, Psalm 93 chants praises to a cosmic king:

The world you made firm, not to be moved;
Your throne has stood firm from of old.
From all eternity, O Lord, you are.
The waters have lifted up, O Lord,
the waters have lifted up their voice,
the waters have lifted up their thunder.
Greater than the roar of mighty waters,
more glorious than the surgings of the sea,
the Lord is glorious on high.

Psalm 148: These introductory psalms are followed by the Canticle of Daniel and the traditional praise psalms, alternating between Psalm 148, Psalm 149, and Psalm 150, in a four week cycle. Of these three, Psalm 148 gives most voice to creation:

Praise the Lord from the heavens,
praise him in the heights.
Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his host.
Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, shining stars.
Praise him, highest heavens
and the waters above the heavens.
Praise the Lord from the earth,
sea creatures and all oceans,
fire and hail, snow and mist,
stormy winds that obey his word;
all mountains and hills,
all fruit trees and cedars,
beasts, wild and tame,
reptiles and birds on the wing.

\[12 \text{ Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours (Baltimore: Helicon 1976) 857-858} \]
Cosmic redemption: Beyond the psalms themselves, many of the Hours contain hints of cosmic redemption. Take, for example, this response to an evening reading during the first and second weeks of Lent:

The whole creation proclaims the greatness of your glory.
– The whole creation proclaims the greatness of your glory.

Eternal ages praise
– the greatness of your glory.

Glory to the Father . . .
– The whole creation.

Intercessory prayers: This introduction to the intercessory prayers witnesses to the power of the creative and redemptive Word:

The world was created by the Word of God, re-created by his redemption, and it is continually renewed by his love. Rejoicing in him we call out:

Renew the wonders of your love, Lord.

We give thanks to God whose power is revealed in nature,
– and whose providence is revealed in history.

Medieval Mystics

Hildegard of Bingen: The Middle Ages produced a great number of mystics steeped in the contemplation of creation. One of the more popular was the abbess, Hildegard of Bingen, herself a Benedictine. Hildegard, a visionary, poet, composer and botanist, often wrote of God’s viriditas or greening power. In this poem in honour of St. Disibode she celebrates that saint’s viriditas:

O, lifegiving greenness of God’s hand,
with which he has planted an orchard.
You rise resplendent into the highest heavens,
like a towering pillar.
You are glorious in God’s work.
And you, O mountain heights,
will never waver when God tests you.
Although you stand in the distance as if in exile,
No armed power is mighty enough to attack you.
You are glorious in God’s work.14

The greening power of God: Hildegard’s work is full of nature themes and images. She was indeed a woman steeped in the greening power of God, living as she did in the lush Rhineland valley during the 12th century.

13 Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York: Doubleday 1990) 244
14 P. Barth et al., eds., Hildegard von Bingen: Leider, trans. J. Dybdal (Salzburg, 1969) 244
Francis of Assisi

Patron saint of ecology: Though it is evident by now, the presence of an ecological sensibility has deep and early roots in the Christian tradition, Francis of Assisi, declared by Pope John Paul II in 1979 as the patron saint of ecology, is perhaps the best known and best loved of the creation mystics. If his prayer is any evidence of a life close to creation, he was indeed a man who could have preached to birds and reasoned with wolves:

Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no [human] is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars
in heaven. You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living [person] can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.15

The web of life: With Francis we witness a truly ecological spirituality, so at home did he feel with his “Sister, Mother earth.” There is nothing of the primacy of human need here, only a sense of the web of life, acting in harmony for the good of all life, and a sense that we as humans are blessed benefactors in the circle of being.

Creation and Contemporary Theology

Contemporary theology is more aware of creation than was the case for some time. Some theologians are trying to discern "what went wrong" – when and how Christian theology became separated from a firm and holistic relationship with creation. Others are urging the churches to a new awareness of creation and to greater care for the earth at a practical level.

The Nature of the Problem

It will be seen from the following brief review that individual theologians come to different conclusions regarding the question, "what went wrong?"

Seventeenth century: Carol Merchant, in her landmark work, The Death of Nature, provides evidence that organic cosmology remained intact in the lives of ordinary people in the West until the 17th century. This in spite of the presence of acknowledged dualistic philosophy. The deciding factor in altering this relationship, according to Merchant, was not only the scientific revolution but the rise of an economic model – industrial capitalism – which "deanimated" the earth.

Fourteenth century: Thomas Berry, a contemporary environmental theologian, suggests that prior to the 14th century Christianity viewed the natural world as a fundamental source of the divine, a primary place of encounter with the sacred. It was not until the great death-bearing plagues of mid-14th century with their baffling cause and disastrous effects that Europe and for all intents and purposes, the entire Western world, began to view nature as enemy. Westerners now sought the holy beyond this world, beyond the limits of physical existence, outside of nature. Nature became inanimate, literally, without soul.

Spirituality separate from nature: Berry proposes that people responded in two ways to this development: an increasingly otherworldly spirituality (including both life and prayer), and the rise of modern science. Thus, what was until that time an uneasy balance between the forces of dualism and holism in the Christian faith no longer held. For the first time in Christian history, Christian spirituality was severed from the contemplation of created things.

2 Merchant, The Death of Nature, 55; Zappone, The Hope for Wholeness, 43, 120-121, 124
3 Thomas Berry, "The New Story," in The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books 1988) 125-128
The plague: A historical theologian, Margaret Miles concurs in good part with Berry's analysis. She points out in general, how helpless people of that period felt in the presence of illness, accident and physical pain, and consequently how the human body was viewed with anxiety and distrust. In particular she notes the context for the writing of The Imitation of Christ, one of the most influential spiritual works of High Middle Ages:

The pandemic plague that swept Europe in the generation before Thomas A. Kempis was born and continued to flare in various locations about once in every generation for the next several centuries also provides an essential piece of the setting for his instructions.

Hellenistic culture: Sallie McFague traces the seeds of the shift earlier still, beginning with the synthesis of neoplatonist and Hebrew cosmology. Arguing that the classic organic model of the universe prevailed in various forms, Paul's particular appropriation of it for hellenistic culture, as the body of Christ, eroded its original breadth:

The model, while acknowledged and used, was narrowed to human beings, and especially those who acknowledged Christ as the deity. It lost its cosmic reach, the inclusion of the natural world and all human beings.

Rise of science: She agrees with Berry that with the rise of science and rationalism of the seventeenth century, these few remnants of the classic organic model gave way to a view of the cosmos as a machine. Henceforth relationships between humanity and nature were increasingly modelled on the dominant patriarchal cast of the divine-human relationship: Lord over servant, King over subject, men over women.

Ancient New East: Rosemary Radford Ruether, while disputing none of these later developments, locates the origin of this shift in consciousness much earlier: in the ancient Near East, the Hebrew creation stories, and their subsequent Christian overlays. Though Ruether demonstrates that human "domination" and commands to "subdue the earth," were limited by prohibitions on the eating of flesh, and balanced by the rights of animals to Sabbath rest, she recognizes, nevertheless, a creeping anthropocentrism in the very genesis of Judeo-Christian life itself.

Rethinking necessary: Whatever the critical turning point might have been, whether the rise of patriarchy, the hegemony of hellenistic culture, or the emergence of science, it should be clear by now that any recovery of a holistic model of earth-human-divine relations will require a radical re-thinking of long held assumptions about how we live and how we pray. Perhaps Thomas Berry best captures the urgency, the starkness and the real passion of the choices we face when he warns:

... the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.

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4 Margaret Miles, Practising Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality (New York: Crossroad 1988) 25
5 Sallie McFague, The Body of God. An Ecological Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress 1993) 32
7 Thomas Berry, Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth (Mystic: Twenty-third Publications 1991) 43
New Awareness of Creation

**Contemporary theologians:** Several theologians are attempting to re-vision an organic model of the cosmos in our own century. These include Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest and cultural historian who describes himself as a "geologian," Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Catholic feminist theologian, Sallie McFague, a Protestant feminist and process theologian, Diane Bergant, a Catholic scripture scholar, and the creation-centered priest-theologian, Matthew Fox, to name just a few.

**Teilhard de Chardin:** Most owe a debt to the pioneer of divine-cosmos investigations, Jesuit paleontologist and priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Thomas Berry claims that Teilhard de Chardin’s integration of the scientific story with the Christian story of the earth represents a shift in consciousness perhaps unparalleled since the theology of Paul.

**John Paul II:** Though theological reflection in this area has been going on for some decades now, it was only in 1988 that an official church document, *Solititudo Rei Socialis*, tackled the topic of the environment in any substantial way. Still, ecological issues were of secondary importance in this document, receiving a brief review by way of general cautions about the hazards of unrestrained industrialization. The document, for example, lacked an in-depth analysis of the severity and nature of global warming, the greenhouse effect, acid rain, or of possible solutions to these problems.

**World Day of Peace:** A more complete analysis and call to action would have to wait until 1990. *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, is a powerful, though as yet little known document, issued by John Paul II for the annual World Day of Peace. In it the Pope repeatedly insists, "the ecological crisis is a moral crisis."

**Inculturation:** Though conscious and concerted official church teaching regarding the ecological crisis has been slow to appear, the seeds of a more earth-enhancing theology have been germinating for some time in related papal initiatives concerning inculturation. John Paul II has strongly encouraged the inculturation of the gospel among the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas. An unanticipated fruit of this process is a theology that is particularly sensitive to the role that creation plays in the lives of traditional peoples. The pope has identified the liturgy as one of the main tools of inculturation, and he has modelled such openness in many of his pastoral visits around the world.

**The Dene:** For example, during his 1987 visit to Ft. Simpson, NWT, Pope John Paul II willingly observed the traditional prayers of blessing practiced by the Dene. Pray for a moment with this excerpt from the Blessing of the Land:

- We give thanks to you, creator of all,
  - for this land and all she produces,
  - for the animals of the land and water and sky,
  - for the plants which help us to live healthy lives,
  - for the lives we live in caring for this beautiful land
  - you have given to our care.
In this ancient ritual the primal elements and the four directions, indeed, the very circle of Life stands acknowledged.

Earth Summit: Concern for such an indigenous and ecologically sensitive spirituality was evident throughout the proceedings of the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit (UNCED) in Brazil. For perhaps the first time in United Nations' history, spirituality maintained a parallel presence with official proceedings, with representatives from dozens of religious traditions taking part in special rituals, prayer vigils, and meditations. Delegates from the Vatican as well as the Brazilian Catholic Bishops Conference were active observers at the UNCED summit, alongside the large and varied delegation from the World Council of Churches.

Wisdom keepers: On the eve of the official conference, Hannah Strong, spouse of UNCED Secretary General Maurice Strong, chaired “a sacred heart conference” which brought together "spiritual insights from indigenous peoples and various religious traditions." "Wisdom-Keepers" maintained a constant presence of prayer and meditation throughout the summit, gathering around fire and drumbeat at a retreat centre near Rio Centre.12

At “the Global Forum,” participants representing over sixty distinct religious traditions gathered in tents at Rio's Flamengo Park to pray, meditate and worship simultaneously in an all night vigil culminating in a common interfaith service at dawn.

Communication flowed back and forth between the summit participants and religious observers. Conference participants brought prayer intentions to these gatherings and prayerful observers in turn accompanied the conference.13

In their resulting Pentecost letter to the churches, Searching for the New Heavens and the New Earth, the World Council of Churches delegation gave voice to the urgent task before all Christians vis-à-vis the environment. Primary among their recommendations was a plea for a spirituality and liturgy consistent with an earth-reverencing ethic:

Our churches themselves must be places where we learn anew what it means that God's covenant extends to all creatures, by rediscovering the eco-centric dimension of the Bible... At the same time we should include the material elements in our celebrations and praise the cosmic symphony the Spirit continually composes.14

They also committed themselves among other things to:

Raise the ecological sensitivity of church members through preaching, teaching, performing rituals and adopting simplicity of lifestyle.15

As one theologian-observer at the Summit reflected, “A central calling of churches today is to develop a spirituality of creation.”16

12 Ibid., 37
13 Ibid., 37
15 Ibid., 33
16 Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, 38
Ecology, Liturgy, and Spirituality: Making the Connections

A constant tradition: A spirituality that is conscious of creation, and likewise, worship that is inclusive of creation, have been part of our Christian tradition from the beginning. As we have seen, it has been given voice in the blessing tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures (the psalmists and the wisdom writers), the itinerant Christ of the parables, the Desert Fathers and Mothers of third, fourth and fifth century Egypt, the monastic movements, mendicant orders, the nature mystics of the Middle Ages, and Christians of later centuries as well. There have always been "nature mystics" in the Tradition of the Church: mystics whose starting point in their journey to God was the natural world.

God at the heart of creation: A spirituality that includes the cosmos seeks God at the heart of creation. God is in all things; all things are in God. Such a spirituality is not pantheistic: it does not say that all things are divine. However, it affirms a radical panentheism at the heart of creation, at the heart of sacred scripture, at the heart of worship: God remains mystery, uncontrollable, uncontrollable, and yet at the same time radically present, radically imminent, radically incarnated.

Recovering ancient wisdom: A spirituality that is inclusive of creation seeks to recover the wisdom of the body and the earth and mend the dualisms which have kept humans separated from matter, the mother of life. Though its name may be new, its practice is ancient.

An incarnational approach: A spirituality that is holistic with respect to creation describes an approach to the sacred through the natural world, an approach rediscovered in our time when the natural world – and some would argue, the world of the sacred – seem in peril. What has been called nature mysticism is nothing but a radically incarnational approach to the body of God in the body of the world; a radically sacramental approach to living. Life is sacred; all life reveals the holy.

A sacramental approach: An ecologically sensitive spirituality is a profoundly Christian spirituality because it is profoundly sacramental. And like sacramentality it depends for its expression on the creation of the world and the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus.

Respect for nature: A Catholic Christian sensibility has always affirmed that the world shows forth the presence of God. Catholic liturgy respects the rhythms and cycles of nature; it also respects the metaphorical and real power of the elements: earth, fire, wind and water. None of the sacramental rites are without their reference to the human body and to natural creation.

Nature and bodiliness in worship: Thus liturgy remains for most Catholics, and increasingly for many other Christians, worship at the level of experience and nature: body and blood, seasons of dying and rising, necessary rhythms of darkness and light, death and rebirth, and with it a God we in some ways touch, catch hold of, glimpse, taste, smell, even if only for a fleeting moment, even if only a "backside" view (Exodus 33.23b). Thus worship in its most basic forms looks, feels and sounds profoundly natural. Bodies are part of every celebration. Thus in our age, if the very elements of nature are in jeopardy, the very elements of life, then so too are the root elements of Christian faith.

Light and darkness: Try to imagine, for example, the liturgical year without the presence of light and of darkness. How powerfully would our worship speak without recognition of the seasons of life and death, without the cycles of rest, waiting and fallow, without times of growth, fertility and fruitfulness?

Fire and air: Where would the great vigil of Easter be without the reality of fire? Without fire how could we understand the purifying power of the Holy Spirit, or the compassion at the heart of God? Without air, without wind and breath, how would we sustain our belief in the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life, gracious and wild?

Water and bathing: Without clean water how will any community celebrate life of any kind, let alone the new life of baptism? Indeed, how could we bathe any child with water polluted by nuclear wastes? How could we eat the body of a Christ ravaged by pesticides and chemical abuse?

What kind of world and indeed what kind of community are we bringing someone into where we destroy the very stuff of which life is made? If the elements ceased to exist? What are we saying about the value of human life, of life itself? of the Divine? Thomas Berry argues that "if we lived on the moon," our sense of God would be as desolate as it is.

Imagination is required for religious development. What would there be to imagine if we lived on the moon? We would have something, but it would be very meagre.

Sacraments and nature: Imagination is required for faith development; it is also required for life-giving worship. In a desolate landscape, to echo Berry's words, "we would have something, but it would be very meagre." We cannot come to God outside of our bodies. Sacraments depend for their power on basic elements of nature. Without it they lose their meaning and their reality.

3 Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic: Twenty-third Publications 1991) 9
4 Ibid.
Eucharist in time of famine: How might people celebrate eucharist in the midst of a famine, for without the bread of life we have nothing to offer, nothing to speak the incarnate God, the living Christ? The Sacramentary, in its Prayers to be Said by Those Suffering from Hunger\textsuperscript{5} gives us words: “Merciful Lord, in need we offer you these gifts.” Hungry, we pray with a certain incredulity:

\begin{quote}
God our Father, maker not of death, but of life,  
you provide all your [people] with food.  
Mercifuly take away hunger and starvation from our midst,  
That we may serve you with joyful, carefree hearts.
\end{quote}

It is not without reason, then, that liturgical books contain prayers and blessings for the fertility of crops, livestock, hunting, gathering, planting and harvest. It is not without reason that churches used to be built so that worshippers might be facing east, east to the rising sun and the new day, the Day of the Lord. It is not without reason that we pour (or used to do so) the leavings of consecrated wine and holy water down a special channel, a channel which feeds into the earth. The earth is, after all, a holy vessel, a vessel worthy of Christ.

We Christians carry an important memory: God became flesh and dwelt among us. It makes up one of the central proclamations of Christian worship and Christian life.

\textsuperscript{5} Sacramentary, n 538
Seasons of observance: Last Easter I hosted a gathering for new friends I had made over the year, most of whom were unchurched Christians, most of whom experienced some kind of painful relationship with organized religion. I called it a celebration of spring and new life. It took one of the alienated, a nonpractising Catholic, to boldly speak the word "Easter." "I haven't celebrated Easter for several years," she confided to me, "but I want to. I like Easter. It always seems to be a very special time of year for me. A lot of spiritual things seem to happen to me this time of year." Afterwards, I wanted to say: "You don't know how Catholic you really are." Her instincts, of course, are fundamentally Christian, not just Catholic; her intuition profoundly liturgical. We need seasons of observance in our lives, rites of passage. For Christians these come contoured in the rich tradition of the Church year.

Advent and Christmas

Life begins in the dark: Our liturgical year begins in the dark, much as the world began as an empty "void, darkness [hovering] over the deep," much as birth, much as all life begins: brooding, germinating, pregnant, waiting, evolving. All life begins this way: human, animal, plant; the development of air, sea and minerals is rather similar. The formation is ongoing and cyclical, spiralling, Advent-like in posture. The night of beginnings speaks a warm and fertile darkness. There is no hint of failing here. A sense of incompleteness, yes. But more than that, reverence, joyful expectation, as a mother waits for a longed-for child to be born, a yet unseen face, the embodiment of a cherished hope.

The return of light: This dark season has not so much to do with sin as it is with the return of the Sun/Son, the return of the Light, Incarnation, a vision of completeness-come. We decorate Christmas trees with lights — a Germanic, prechristian practice commemorating the constant renewal of the Tree of Life, the source of renewal at the centre of the cosmos.

The Sun of Justice: It is no accident then, that the Sun of Justice is born on the shortest night of the year, into a season and a world in tremendous need of light. Nor that there is tremendous anticipation given in a time of cold and dark. Or that a most joyous feast might surround it. Advent or Christmas, both movements call upon the image of a pregnant virgin waiting, a pregnant world birthing the Divine Light into the darkness of winter.

All creation waits: The darkest night of the year and all of our darkest nights are in need of a redeemer, of cheer at the thought of God made human, God made flesh, as the writer of John's gospel so carefully puts it, because God is
born to all creatures this night. Just as the first covenant was made with all creatures, so is this one: the ass, the ox, the shepherds with their sheep – the very stars keep watch. And all creation awaits the coming of its Creator and Sovereign in glory, grayness, dampness and uncertainty.

**Ordinary Time**

**Seeds in the winter:** In the cycle of the church year, Ordinary Time begins in the middle of winter, when all would appear to be dead; everything is buried under snow, blanketed by cold. Winter is the time when we move underground, into the subterranean passages of our lives, the nights of our dreams. And if we look closely enough, we find the seeds, the pods, the tiny beginnings of leaves in bud sheltering on branch, in bush, in shrub. We look forward to the "Eighth Day" as our ancestors called it, the day when the realm of God might unfold.

**Fallow time:** As a child growing up on the farm, winter was the time when our fields lay fallow, not in waste and unproductiveness, but in preparation for another season of fruitfulness. They rested, regaining strength, vital energy, nitrogen, nutrients. We knew that the soil reconstituted itself in darkness, under the snows and the layers of last year's stalks, chaff and rot, debris now food for new growth. A necessary part of Ordinary Time, winter is a time of rest. Time for grieving that which has died. Time for recovering lost strength. Time for refurbishing what Sallie McFague has metaphorically referred to as the "Body of God," the earth; so too, God's people, the Body of Christ.

**Lent**

**Images of hope:** Lent, the time of "lengthening days," follows as a season of preparation for initiation, first conversion and annual conversion. It is full of images of hope: the readying of seed for planting, the necessary light and inner warmth, the necessary time and stillness for germination, the necessary soaking and watering of the ground, the necessary preparing of the soil, whether of earth or of soul. While the world is readying itself for growth and life, thawing itself from the grip of winter, the readings and liturgies of the church year are unfolding our hearts for some of the same.

**There is great stirring during Lent,** a great stirring in the very depths of a person's soul and in the spirit of the community. We are re-dressing ourselves, reconstituting ourselves -- or rather, we are being reconstituted, readied, shaped, reformed in fundamental, radical ways. On Ash Wednesday we meditate on the earth of which we are a part. The gospels of this time burst through the hard seed coats of our hearts, they swell our longings, they challenge our vision of fruitfulness. We are challenged to re-seed, replant, recommit ourselves.

**The land fasts:** We associate Lent with that in-between time of not-yet-spring and no-longer-winter, when all appears dead and gray, when nothing seems to be growing and everything is, where it waits, just below the surface dormant yet germinating. It is then that we fast, as the land seems to fast, walking that last stretch of the road with our Liberator.
We eagerly watch the return of the light, each day strengthening itself, rising higher, days growing longer. We watch as the snows recede, sinking, as last year’s grass uncovers itself brown and lifeless, as the buds of trees begin to bulge, sap coursing through their branches once again.

Easter and Pentecost

As seeds stir and warm and break forth, and as shoots of green emerge from winter snows, Easter comes, like a fire out of the dawn. At Easter we light the new fire. We witness the return of the light in force, set as it is to follow on the spring equinox, light outweighing darkness. Days emerge from semi-darkness, yet a darkness that was necessary (as the Exultet sings, “O Happy Fault”), a darkness that is necessary for all living things.

In the fifty days of Easter we live the transformation of spring into summer, the profusion of new shoots and first blossoms, the shooting of trees into leaf. We awake early in the morning to “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, [seemingly] singing,” (Revelation 5.13a) witnessing to something much greater than any one of them. On our daily rounds we see in action the promise of a gracious creator, “See, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21.5).1 Farmers look forward to the “water of life,” the return of the early spring rains so critical to the germination of crops (Revelation 7.17).2 It is during this season too that we catch glimpses of the reign of God to come, “the tree of life” (Revelation 22.14) burgeoning on all sides.

As Pentecost pours forth we remember the pouring out of the Holy Spirit of Jesus on all the races and peoples and indeed the whole of the cosmos (Acts 2.1-21). Appropriately, in the Ukrainian Catholic Church Pentecost takes the name Zeleni Sviate or Green Holidays. Built upon a pre-Christian feast celebrating the arrival of Spring, “it is [their] custom to decorate the entire church with greenery. Large branches of trees are brought into the church,” and with them, the forest and the greening of all creation.3

Renew the face of the earth: At Pentecost, we chant and we pray: “Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of earth.” At a time of year when the elements would seem to quicken and the winds shift we readily implore:

Father of light, from whom every good gift comes, 
send your Spirit into our lives 
with the power of a mighty wind, 
and by the flame of your wisdom 
open the horizons of our minds.4

The languages of creation: At Pentecost we behold the multiple languages of creation, their colors, tastes, shapes, sounds and textures, fertile and maturing. It is a world one year older yet somehow newer, a world with the glow of summer about it.

1 Fifth Sunday of Easter C, second reading
2 Fourth Sunday of Easter C, second reading
4 Pentecost. Mass during the Day. Alternative Opening Prayer
Life and death intermingle: It is almost summer when Ordinary Time returns to us, summer in all its headiness and warmth, its fullness and growth. And the liturgy asks us, what is the fullness of life and growth for the human? The gospels, most of them parables, taken from nature or accounts set in nature, tell of the cultivation and the movement of a sanctifying life. Still other gospel vignettes tell of bodily blindness and infirmity changed by healing spirit. Interestingly, it is during this season that rural communities seek out blessings of fertility for animals and crops, gardens and orchards. It is during this time too that farmers seek rituals of thanksgiving for the harvest.

As liturgist Scott McCarthy points out, "the Church has always celebrated rites of kenosis and plerosis, rites of emptying and rites of filling." Yet neither movement is strictly separate from the other; neither occurs in isolation of the other: life and death intermingle like bread and wine, body and blood, space and matter. As McCarthy observes, each of these seasons is a study in the prophetic ambivalence of contrasts: the birthday of Jesus in the heart of cold, the hope of new life carried in the barren branches of a late autumn day, the intensification of penance against a backdrop of germinating growth. These contrasts continue with the sacraments.

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5 See, for example, the gospels for Friday, Eighth Week in Ordinary Time; Monday, Ninth Week; Monday, Tenth Week; Tuesday, Tenth Week; Thursday, Eleventh Week
6 See, for example, the gospels for Thursday, Eighth Week; Saturday, Eighth Week
7 Scott McCarthy, Celebrating the Earth (San Jose: Resource Publications 1991) 95
8 Ibid., 97-98
Sacraments and Creation

A holistic spirituality: I teach a course on spirituality, and when we come to the part about sacramentality, I try to tell the students, "This is not just about seven sacraments - This is about a God who is present everywhere, a God who comes in the flesh, a Christ resurrected in the Body, a body and a creation transparent to God and for God." It is about a God who fills the universe from end to end (Colossians 1.20), a God "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17.28). For as the Rule of St. Benedict says: "We believe that God is everywhere, and that the Lord sees both good and evil in all places" (ch. 19). Christian spirituality is essentially holistic because of its sacramental basis.

Matter transformed in Christ: This is a particularly Christian declaration - a sacramental declaration: not all matter is passing. Instead, all matter is transformed in Christ or more precisely "in the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1.23).

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. (Romans 1.20)

Sacraments are about the stuff of our lives: the very food that we grow, the table companionship we keep, the hurts and the cares we suffer, celebrate and strive to forgive; the birth, growth and change of living, the commitments of loving and serving concretely with our whole persons.

Sacraments speak the universe, all flesh, all materiality, all that is visible, because behind it all, in the midst of it all is the force we call Life, the power we call Love, the Creator we call Being. Our tradition has used many names: Yahweh - I am who am (Exodus); Is-ness (Meister Eckhart); The Ground of All Being (Paul Tillich); Verb (Dabhar); Mystery (Elizabeth Johnson).

The presence of God: Catholic sensibility has always affirmed that the world shows forth the presence of God. Catholic liturgy respects the rhythms and cycles of nature; it also respects the metaphorical and real power of the elements: earth, fire, wind and water. They are part of every celebration if not in raw form then in fruit. For example, the bread and wine of Eucharist are the fruits of human-earth cooperation. The water of baptism, of blessing, of purification - holy water - is a worthy harbinger of the sacred, since it too gives life. The presence of the light of Christ in the form of burning candles, particularly the Easter candle, remind us of the Easter fire in which this light originated, and the origins of new life. This fire graces our altars during most of our celebrations in one form or another.

The body is blessed: Catholic liturgy at its best also affirms, if not overtly at least implicitly, the importance of body and bodily expression. Healthy, appropriate, nonsexual bodily touch, which our culture has so little experience of and contemporary North American people such fear of, is a theme running through most of the Catholic sacramental tradition. It is almost as if we must
be told, over and over again, that the human body is blessed and good, that any body is blessed and good, even in its impermanence, even in its frailty. Remember: "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Incarnate. Like us, "born of a woman" (Job 14.1a).

**Temple of the Holy Spirit**: Our bodies speak our beings, make visible our spirits, or better, offer hands, eyes, mouth, feet, arms for our world. Without our bodies we would not have selves for speaking, dancing, touching; we would not have relationships with other human beings or with the rest of creation or with the Holy. "Do you not know that you are God's temple... that your body is a temple?" (1 Corinthians 3.16; 6.19)

**Embodied spirits, enspirited flesh**: the Hebrew people felt the two were inseparable, that one spoke for the other, that there were really no distinct words for one or the other. "Living beings" (Genesis 2.7) that we are, we are a unity. It is not surprising then that our sacraments remind us of this: in the laying on of hands in Reconciliation, Confirmation, Anointing, the kiss of peace at Eucharist, the breaking of bread; the prostration of Ordination candidates before the community; the pledge of fidelity in the exchange of wedding rings; the washing and anointing of Baptism. We witness simple but profound gestures of Presence.

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### Christian Initiation

The Rite of Christian Initiation draws on images of human family and human birth in this water blessing:

Holy Church of God, stretch out your hand and welcome your children newborn of water and of the Spirit of God. (n 454.19)

**The gestures of immersion and anointing**, bodily touch and washing declare this is to be a bodily event, an earthly, embodied, remembered moment. For example, the related U. S. Bishops' document, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, urges that the font be large enough "to allow for the immersion of infants at least, and to allow for the pouring of water over the entire body of a child or adult" (n 76).

In the early church, this immersion was often total, for adults as well as children, and the anointing encompassed the entire person. Initiates' entire bodies were massaged from head to toe with fragrant oil (thus the need for deacons and deaconesses).

**In the action of baptism** the very church is born:

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's only Son, for you offered yourself on the cross, that in the blood and water flowing from your side, and through your death and resurrection, the Church might be born. Blessed be God. (n 215.B)

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1. (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1987). Most of what is said here applies as well to the Rite of Baptism for Children.

Creation of the cosmos: Yet birth and the implications of birth do not rest here. The rite would see this event as one with the first birth: the very creation of the cosmos. Among the acclamations and hymns of this rite one finds obvious references to the primordial Word of creation as in this song:

The Father's voice calls us above the waters,  
the glory of the Son shines on us,  
the love of the Spirit fills us with life. (n 454.4)

Creation of the waters: Accompanying berakahs or blessing prayers harken back to this original river, this water of the first days:

Praise to you, almighty God and Father, for you have created water to cleanse and to give life.  
Blessed be God. (n 215.B)

And again in this second example:

Come to us, Lord, Father of all, and make holy this water which you have created, so that all who are baptized in it may be washed clean of sin and be born again to live as your children.  
Hear us, Lord. (n 215.B)

Living water: In this rite, however, the importance of creation goes beyond words, being present in the very elements of the rite itself. For example, Environment and Art in Catholic Worship urges that the water used in baptism ought if at all possible be “living, moving water,” water as it is found in the wild, as from the clearest spring, the source of great rivers (n 77). Water from a tap just does not carry the same rich associations.

Holy chrism: The oil of Christian initiation, chrism, is oil of the finest, the purest, the most expensive origins. Traditionally of the olive tree, it is oil reserved for nobles, for royalty, citizens of “a new heaven and a new earth,” oil that is the gift of the earth and a product of human care. The rubrics direct that it be blended with perfume or balsam, natural fragrances derived from the pollen of flowers and the soothing resins of trees like the balsam fir.3 Indeed all of creation is witness to this new birth.

“The Easter candle and its standard. . . at the baptismal font. . .”4 recalls the first light, the first day, primordial fire, the light of Christ. Marking the candle at the Easter Vigil, the church declares “Christ, yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, all time belongs to him and all ages.”5 All ages, human and prehistoric; all time and space encompassed. In these actions we celebrate nothing less than the source of the universe; its present, its past, its future. All time stands present to this new birth.

Rebirth of the cosmos: Christ's resurrection heralds the rebirth of the cosmos which transforms all of creation. Hidden in the following hymn, which is

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3 Rite of Consecrating the Chrism, in Rites of the Catholic Church (New York: Pueblo 1976) n 23, p 524
4 Environment and Art, n 90
5 Sacramentary. Easter Vigil, Preparation of the Candle
suggested for baptism, for example, are references to the resurrected Christ now one with the cosmos:

  How great the sign of God's love for us,
  Jesus Christ our Lord: . . .
  He lived and suffered and died for us,
  but the Spirit raised him to life. . . .
  . . . living in the Father's glory,
  he fills all creation
  and guides it to perfection. (n 453.2)

Connected with creation: And we in Christ are expected to transform creation to this same perfection. Baptism reminds us how deeply we are connected with creation past, present and future, and how profoundly our actions affect it, whether its building up or its tearing down.

Penance

A consciousness of creation is evident too in the Rite of Penance. The following act of repentance responds to a Lenten examination of conscience and consciously links the seasons of nature to the seasons of the church year:

  My brothers and sisters, the hour of God's favor draws near, the day of his mercy and of our salvation, when death was destroyed and eternal life began. This is the season for planting new vines in God's vineyard, the time for pruning the vines to ensure a richer harvest.  

Planting, new vines, pruning, rich harvest – once again we hear echoes of hope amidst the pathos of death; promise amid words of repentance.

Primal light: A similar prayer in the Advent communal penitential celebration includes its own seasonal references to winter's night skies and waning days, its own memory of primal light:

  Lord our God,
  on the first day of creation
  you made the light
  that scatters all darkness.
  Let Christ, the light of lights,
  hidden from all eternity,
  shine at last on your people
  and free us from the darkness of sin.  

Anointing: Blessing of the Oil of the Sick

A healer: Several years ago, when I was staying with some Mexican friends on their few acres of land in a primitive rural area of northern Mexico, I accompanied

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6 Rite of Penance. Appendix II, I.13, in Rites of the Catholic Church
7 Ibid., Appendix II, II. 24e
them on a visit to the local curandero or healer. The man, a poor worker with a family of his own, had a regular job during the day and in the evening offered his gift to all who came. A curandero charges no fee and accepts only whatever offering a person or a person's family can make. This offering might be money, food, or service in kind. Curanderos are recognized in their communities as possessing a gift of healing. The curandero embodies within himself a seemingly curious mix of popular religiosity and folk tradition.

Devout people: My friends are both Catholic Christians of devout faith. Teresa, the senora, once worked as a lay catechist among her people. She organized the building of a church, a school and a local base community. Yet a visit to a curandero did not present her with a contradiction in faith or an obstacle. I was soon to see why.

Sacred space: Entering the tiny hut where the curandero carried out his treatments was very much like entering a special sanctuary, a sacred space. Over an altar, full of burning candles, holy oils and waters from various Marian pilgrimages, stood an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Virgin extraordinaire of Mexico. On the bare earth floor lay a mat and a blanket where the ailing would come for treatment. My friends' four-year-old daughter had been having stomach complaints for several days. Her grandmother's own folk medicine (usually quite effective) was not enough this time.

Therapeutic: Having spoken first to the parents about the problem, the curandero, in a rite of simple Christian prayer, anointing and touch, applied healing waters and oils. The images were priestly and therapeutic, the faces of the parents anxious, waiting, the shadows of flickering candles comforting. The circle of support calmed the child and her family. The prayers and the touch seemingly brought her some relief.

In the early church: As foreign as it sounds, this picture is not far from healing as it was experienced in the early church, and as it has been presented in the revised Rite of Anointing of the Sick. The practice of anointing is understood as a communal action touching the entire person: body, mind and spirit, an action involving all the powers of the cosmos: human and divine. "Are there any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5.14).

Oil, water, bread: Joseph Martos cites Egyptian and Syrian liturgical texts from the mid-third century and late fourth century containing blessing prayers for oil, water and bread. At different times and places any of these three substances might be called upon in Christian healing.

Oil in particular was a common curative in the ancient world and biblical accounts are consistent with this view (see Isaiah 1.6; Mark 6.13; Luke 10.34). The revised Rite of Communion of the Sick contains a provision for sprinkling holy water on the person who is sick and the environs.

Anointing by laity: Finally, as Martos points out, anointing of the sick in its beginnings was often carried out not only by priests but also by gifted lay Christians. As evidenced in the passage from James quoted above it was carried out communally, surrounded by one's family in Christ.

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9 *Pastoral Care of the Sick* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1983) n 82
10 Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 373
The entire community: In the revised rite of anointing the church tries to recapture some of this early tradition, inviting the family and friends and where possible the entire Christian community to be part of the celebration, acknowledging nature's gift of oil:

Graciously listen to our prayer of faith:
send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler,
into this precious oil, this soothing ointment,
this rich gift, this fruit of the earth. (n 123. B)

Healing is seen as encompassing the entire person:
Bless this oil and sanctify it for our use.
Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it;
heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit,
and deliver them from every affliction. (n 123. B)

The Rite for the Consecration of Chrism tells us even more. Here the history of the olive tree is celebrated, at times in poetic fashion. Creation is participant at more than one point, co-participant with the Divine Creator:

God our maker,
source of all growth in holiness,
accept the joyful thanks and praise
we offer in the name of your Church.

In the beginning, at your command
the earth produced fruit-bearing trees.
From the fruit of the olive tree
you have provided us with oil for holy chrism.
The prophet David sang of the life and joy
that the oil would bring us in the sacraments of your love.

After the avenging flood,
the dove returning to Noah with an olive branch
announced your gift of peace.
This was a sign of a greater gift to come. (n 25)

Death and Burial

Our origins: Rites for the Commendation of the Dying and for Christian burial contain several opportunities for the deepening of our understanding of our earthly and divine origins. In both of these prayers of commendation note how God is addressed:

I commend you, my dear brother/sister,
to almighty God,
and entrust you to your Creator.
May you return to him
who formed you from the dust of the earth.
May holy Mary, the angels, and all the saints
come to meet you as you go forth from this life.12

11 Consecration of the Chrism, in Rites of the Catholic Church, n 25
12 Commendation of the Dying, in Pastoral Care of the Sick, n 220.8
Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the world,
we pray for your servant N.,
and commend him/her to your mercy.
For his/her sake you came down from heaven;
receive him/her now into the joy of your kingdom.
... (for he/she) has worshipped his/her Creator.\(^{13}\)

**Burial:** Some of the most body-affirming liturgy in the Tradition occurs in the *Order of Christian Funerals*.\(^{14}\) We are reminded that "through the use of various baptismal symbols the community shows the reverence due to the body, the temple of the Spirit" (n 299). At various points in the liturgy the body may be sprinkled with blessed water or incensed. "The sprinkling is a reminder that through baptism the person was marked for eternal life and the incensation signifies respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit." (n 314)

Wherever these are done, they are important reminders of the gift of our bodies, still gifts to God and to the larger sacred community of creation. An excerpt from the prayer prayed at the moment the body is placed in the grave, well illustrates this point:

Because God has chosen to call our brother/sister N.
from this life to himself,
we commit his/her body to the earth
(or the deep or its resting place),
for we are dust and unto dust we shall return. (n 393. A)

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**Marriage**

**Co-creation:** Marriage takes much of its power from its basic symbol of sexual love, in which bodies and souls meet in intimacy. It may be argued that co-creation is realized in a myriad of ways, extending far beyond childbearing into extended families, friendships, caring neighborhoods and care for the earth itself. These co-creation themes are intimated in some references to the Genesis story of creation in the liturgical prayers. Take for example these passages taken from two Nuptial Blessings of the Rite of Marriage:\(^{15}\)

Father,
by your power you have made everything out of nothing.
In the beginning you created the universe
and made [humankind] in your own likeness. (n 84.c.1)

Holy Father,
creator of the universe,
maker of man and woman in your own likeness,
source of blessing for the married life. . .
May your fullest blessing come upon [this bride] and her husband

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, 220. D

\(^{14}\) (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1990)

\(^{15}\) *Marriage. Ritual and Pastoral Notes* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1979)
so that they may together rejoice in your gift of married love.
May they be noted for their good lives,
(and be parents filled with virtue.) (n 107)

Natural fertility: As well, it might be noted that natural fertility wants to celebrate itself in this Rite. This intuition is in keeping with biblical sensibilities. For example, fertility themes are dominant throughout the early chapters of Genesis and the Song of Songs, both sources for biblical readings for the Rite. In the Genesis myths, marriage is part and parcel of the larger fertility of creation, birds and sea animals as much as woman and man. It is no wonder then that throwing confetti, which in some places originated in the throwing of spring fruit tree blossoms, probably a pre-Christian practice, cheerfully persists no matter how much pastors and church custodians try to discourage it. This also makes clear why flowers are such an important part of any church wedding decoration.

Fertility of all creation: It should be noted, however, that the Rite while admitting procreation and children as the "crown" of marriage, cautions against "considering the other purposes of marriage of less account."16 One of these purposes arguably could be the preservation of the fertility of all creation. It is important to celebrate human fertility in relationship to the fertility of all life, the home upon which every human family ultimately depends. A further case could be made, therefore, for revised texts which would reflect concern for a life-preserving balance among all species. For a couple embarking upon parenting, Christian responsibility demands that each offspring's basic needs be met. As the earth's primary stewards, we humans carry a similar responsibility to foster the life-giving order of this planet's primary elements. The marriage rite represents a fine opportunity to promote the fertility of all creation.17

Ordination

In the rites of ordination, oil, bread and wine, the fruits of creation and co-creation join hands with word, touch and gesture. The rite shows a continuity that professes service to the community in the form of bodily prostration, in the laying on of hands, and in the celebration of the Body of Christ in the word and in eucharist. Once again the body of the Church, the Body of Christ, moves, gestures, acts.

Eucharist

Growing up on a farm, my family and I knew the intimate connections between wheat and table, family, field, elevator and oven. We knew bread, like life, represented one long continuous chain of being, planted and gathered, handled and passed through many generations. My mother baked bread every Saturday, her daughters all learned how to do so as well. The entire family helped with the harvest: driving, combining, baling, bringing lunch. That God

16 Ibid., Introduction, n 4
was in all of these: farmer, creator, wheat, bakerwoman, bread; that God as eucharist, "this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills, was brought together and became one loaf," was clear to me before I ever heard of the eucharistic experience of the early church that is described in the Didache.  

The Roman Catholic eucharistic prayers hint at this experience of interconnectedness, as, for example, in Eucharistic Prayer III:

Father, you are holy indeed,
and all creation rightly gives you praise.
All life, all holiness comes from you
through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord,
by the working of your Spirit.

The prayers of some other Christian churches more frequently capture this sense of the eucharistic presence in all creation. The Anglican Book of Alternative Services, for example, offers several opportunities. All proper prefaces in the Anglican eucharistic liturgy open with this address to the Holy One:

Blessed are you, gracious God,
creator of heaven and earth. . . .

Several texts for the fraction rites in the Anglican liturgy likewise carry this sense of the presence of the Bread of Life infused throughout creation, harkening back to metaphors found in the Didache. What follows are two fraction texts, one for Ordinary Time, the second for Lent and Holy Week:

Creator of all,
you gave us golden fields of wheat,
whose many grains we have gathered
and made into this one bread.
So may your Church be gathered
from the ends of the earth
into your kingdom.  

We break this bread,
Communion in Christ's body once broken.
Let your Church be the wheat
which bears its fruit in dying.
If we have died with him,
we shall live with him;
if we hold firm,
we shall reign with him.

Galaxies and suns: Some of the Anglican eucharistic prayers are particularly rich in creation themes; the following is the best example of a text that is conscious of the cosmos:

It is right to give thanks and praise,
O Lord, our God, sustainer of the universe,
you are worthy of glory and praise. . . .

19 Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1985) 218-226
20 Ibid., 212
21 Ibid., 213
At your command all things came to be:
the vast expanse of interstellar space,
galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses,
and this fragile earth, our island home;
by your will they were created and have their being.

From the primal elements
you brought forth the human race,
and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill;
you made us stewards of creation.

Pour out your Spirit upon the whole earth
and make it your new creation.
Gather your Church together
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom,
where peace and justice are revealed,
that we, with all your people,
of every language, race, and nation,
may share the banquet you have promised

through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
all glory and honor are yours,
creator of all.

Fountain of life: The next selections are taken from Anglican Eucharistic Prayer 6. Pray with the images that they evoke in you:

It is right to glorify you, Father,
and to give you thanks;
for you alone are God, living and true,
dwelling in light inaccessible
from before time and for ever.
Fountain of life and source of all goodness,
you made all things
and fill them with your blessing;
you created them to rejoice in the splendour of your radiance.
Countless throngs of angels stand before you
to serve you night and day,
and, beholding your presence,
they offer you unceasing praise.
Joining with them,
and giving voice to every creature under heaven,
we acclaim you, and glorify your name
as we sing (say).

We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power;
your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love.
you formed us in your own image,
giving the whole world into our care,
so that, in obedience to you, our creator,
we might rule and serve all your creatures.

Father, you loved the world so much
that in the fullness of time
you sent your only Son to be our Saviour.
Incarnate by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
he lived as one of us,
To fulfill your purpose
he gave himself up to death
and rising from the grave, destroyed death
and made the whole creation new.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, 207-208

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Creation, Sacramentals and Rogation Days

Growing up on the farm, I recall spring, summer and autumn as particularly busy and tenuous seasons, in-between times, numinous moments. In early spring the questions were multiple. There were concerns about getting onto the fields on time. Would there be enough rain to germinate the seed? Enough sunshine? Would the winds bring warmth or pests or both? With summer these concerns turned to fears of hail, too much rain, or too little, drought. With late August came the worry of an early snowfall, a wet Fall, and the all too frequent possibility that the crop would lay damp and unharvested over the winter.

Special prayers: As a youngster I can recall praying for rain, for fair weather, for protection from storms, hail, and killing frost, as well as giving thanks for a good harvest. These were part and parcel of our Sunday worship in a small rural parish. Offered in special prayers they came either during or immediately following Mass. At times they spilled out into colorful processions over the small church lawn. They are a familiar tradition to me, a familial tradition.

Processions: My mother remembers accompanying her mother and a few of her siblings into their fields on a Saskatchewan prairie on a Sunday afternoon to bless the crops. "It must have been late May or early June, already," she recounted, "because I remember that there were little plants, little spears of green already coming through. Grandma would plant palm crosses in all the corners of the field." And after each cross planting their little procession would pause and pray "The Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be and a blessing for good crops."

Prayers and blessings: My grandmother tells that in the Old Country at the turn of the century whole processions of the people moved to the edge of her Austrian village, in full view of their fields, priest and congregation offering prayers and blessings.

Ancient Rome: Not surprisingly the source of this practice goes back to a tradition in ancient pre-Christian Rome. Every springtime Romans would gather, process and pray to the god Robigius for protection from the crop blight robigo. Thus the day, April 25th in the Roman calendar, was called Robigalia.¹

Rogations and ember days: Early Christians adapted this practice of processions, ceremonies and calendar date (traditionally three days before Ascension), adding their own litanies, invocations, and prayers to the God of Jesus Christ, with invocations to the angels and the saints. Special weeks of solemn prayer and fasting were also set aside in mid-Advent, early Lent, post-Pentecost and mid-September: our former ember days. These too appear to have been related to earlier pre-Christian agricultural rites and celebrations.²

¹ Scott McCarthy, Celebrating the Earth (San Jose: Resource Publications 1991) 74-75
² Ibid., 75-76
For us today: Prayers for good harvest and blessing of new seed, our present version of the former rogation days, are suggested by our Canadian liturgical calendar or Ordo. A parallel celebration may be offered on Thanksgiving Day or "a suitable weekday during autumn" (n 24c). "A mass may be celebrated... a bible vigil..." or a service "celebrated in the way considered best in each community" (n 24b). If a mass, the Ordo suggests "a suitable homily and general intercessions" ought to parallel the overriding theme (n 24c).

An eloquent prayer for the Blessing of Fields and Flocks is included in the Roman Book of Blessings. Note the many references to creation:

O God,
from the very beginning of time
you commanded the earth to bring forth vegetation
and fruit of every kind.
You provide the sower with seed and give bread to eat.
Grant, we pray that this land,
enriched by your bounty and cultivated by human hands,
may be fertile with abundant crops.
Then your people, enriched by the gifts of your goodness,
will praise you unceasingly now and for ages unending.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. (n 982)

For growing crops: My immigrant grandmother and her small family probably prayed a simpler though similar blessing for growing crops, perhaps something like this prayer offered in the Canadian Book of Blessings:

Loving Father,
we thank you for your many gifts to us:
for life and light and health,
for family and friends,
for our talents and our joys.
Bless these crops as they are growing,
and continue to protect them from all damage and harm.
Bring us a bountiful harvest,
and teach us to be generous with others
as you are unlimited in your love for us.
Father,
we ask this grace
through Christ our Lord.
Amen

For rogation days: The US Bishops' Household Blessings and Prayers includes this prayer, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, in their service for rogation days:

Dear mother earth, who day by day
Unfolds rich blessing on our way

3 Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy. Liturgical Calendar 1993-1994 (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1993), n 24
5 A Book of Blessings (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops 1981) 143; hereafter referred to as the Canadian Book of Blessings
O praise God! Alleluia!
The fruits and flowers that verdant grow,
Let them his praise abundant show.
O praise God, O praise God,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.  

Prayer of blessing: The Anglican Church of Canada suggests a prayer of blessing which parallels Psalm 65, for the same occasion. Consider how we might adapt other psalms of creation to such a purpose:

Blessed are you, Creator of the universe.
May the pastures be rich for grazing,
and the hills be clothed with joy;
may the fields be covered with grain;
and may we, with all creation,
shout for joy and sing your praise
through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Many prayers and benedictions: Yet rogation days are not the only legacy of our Church’s natural celebrations. The Roman Missal of 1570 included special prayers in time of famine and earthquake, for rain, to repel tempests, and in case of animal disease. In addition, benedictions were performed over elements as diverse and as ordinary as water, ashes, new fruits, eggs, palms, fire and bread.

The Roman Ritual of 1614 also provided processions for averting tempests, for fair weather, for rain, in time of famine. It boasted blessings too numerous to count for animals, ale, cakes, cattle, cheese, chalk, bees, goats, fowl, nonhuman creatures, silkworms, swine, lilies, herbs, medicines, granaries, seed, grapes, new produce, wine, harvest, pastures, young crops, stables, mountain-meadows, mills, wells, tools for scaling mountains, oats, horses, herds, creation consecrated and transformed, community blessings against floods and pests, gold, incense and myrrh. It listed nine blessings for water alone and three for bread and water.

Rome’s 1987 Book of Blessings outlines blessings for animals, for fields and flocks, and on the occasion of thanksgiving for the harvest. Here is just one blessing from the harvest celebration:

All-powerful God,
we appeal to your tender care
that even as you temper the winds and rains
to nurture the fruits of the earth
you will also send upon them
the gentle shower of your blessing.

Fill the hearts of your people with gratitude,
that from the earth’s fertility
the hungry may be filled with good things
and the poor and needy proclaim the glory of your name. (n 1021)

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6 Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers (Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1988) 169
7 Occasional Celebrations of the Anglican Church of Canada (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1992) 181
Cultivation and harvest: The following intercessions, excerpted from the Roman Order for the Blessing of Fields and Flocks, sport metaphors of cultivation, harvest and natural providence:

You have called us, as Saint Paul says, a field under your cultivation; grant that by doing your will in all things we may remain always close to you. (For this we pray:) R.

You have told us that Christ is the vine and we are the branches; grant that by living in your Son we may produce much good fruit. (For this we pray:) R.

You feed the birds of the air and clothe the lilies of the field; teach us not to worry about what we are to eat or drink or wear, but to seek first your kingship over us and your way of holiness. (For this we pray:) R. (n 979)

The contemporary Sacramentary makes available opening prayers, prayers over gifts and prayers after communion for productive land, after the harvest, in time of famine, in time of earthquake, for rain, for fine weather and to avert storms.8

For rain: The following opening prayer for rain builds on Pauline allusions to the divine womb of life, radically immanent. It speaks, if we listen closely, of the earth as one sacred community of life, one with the body of the Redeemer:

Lord God,
in you we live and move and have our being.
Help us in our present time of trouble,
send us the rain we need,
and teach us to seek your lasting help
on the way to eternal life.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (n 545)

In time of famine: This communion prayer in time of famine knits together eucharistic images of bread, hunger, body, providence, and human solidarity:

    God, all-powerful Father,
    may the living bread from heaven
    give us the courage and strength
    to go to the aid of our hungry brothers and sisters.
    We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. (n 537)

For animals: In the Canadian Book of Blessings some of these ancient sacramentals still abide, albeit with contemporary nuance: blessings of homes, parks or gardens, fields or meadows, fields and gardens, workplace, campground, animals, plants, seed, flowers, trees, orchards, prayers for growing crops, bread or food, works of art and fishing fleets. This "Prayer for Kindness to Animals," suggested for use on the Feast Day of St. Francis, illustrates our current society’s concern for the well being of our four legged friends:

Loving Father,
we praise you and thank you
for making animals as part of your wonderful creation.
Help us and all people

8 Sacramentary, nn 534-538; 544-547
to be kind to animals.
Touch the hearts of all with your love
and increase our respect for all your creation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
through whom you made all things
for your glory.⁹

Blessing of produce: The US Bishops' Book of Household Blessings and Prayers includes an Assumption Day Blessing of Produce, excerpts from which follow:

Let us ever praise and extol God's all-embracing providence, who gives us food from the fruits of the earth. Blessed be God forever.

All: Blessed be God forever.

The leader may use these or similar words to introduce the blessing:

The Lord has bestowed the fruits of the earth for the benefit of all the world's people. May we share with all in need and so be good stewards of God's earth and its abundance. We remember the words Mary speaks in the gospel story of the visitation: "The hungry he has filled with good things."

Trust in God: The ritual then draws upon a little used yet image-rich reading from the Book of Joel (2.21-24, 26), extolling the land to trust the Creator:

Fear not, O land!
    exult and rejoice!
    for the Lord has done great things.
Fear not, beasts of the field!
    for the pastures of the plain are green;
The tree bears its fruit,
    the fig tree and the vine give their yield.¹⁰

Right use of nature: Among prayers for fruits of the earth, for harvest, for natural resources and for nature, the United States Presbyterian Book of Common Worship offers this prayer for the right use of nature's power. Take a moment to ponder its meaning in your life, the life of your family and of your community:

Mighty God,
your power fills heaven and earth,
is hidden in atoms
and flung from the sun.
Control us
so that we may never turn natural forces to destruction,
or arm nations with cosmic energy;
but guide us with wisdom and love,
so that we may tame power to good purpose,
for the building of human community
and the betterment of our common lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."¹¹

⁹ Canadian Book of Blessings, 136
¹⁰ Household Blessings and Prayers, 170
¹¹ (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox 1993) 171
For animals: One of the US Bishops' Other Prayers For Animals is also worthy of note:

O Heavenly Father,
protect and bless all things that have breath.
Guard them from all evil,
and let them sleep in peace.¹²

as is an excerpt from the same source which treats animals as friends:

Hear our humble prayer, O God,
for our friends the animals, your creatures.
We pray especially for all that are suffering in any way:
for the overworked and underfed,
the hunted, lost or hungry;
for all in captivity or ill-treated,
and for those that must be put to death.¹³

Blessing of mines: The Occasional Services of the Anglican Church of Canada employs other noteworthy prayers: Blessing for a Family, Prayer for the Environment, and Blessing of Mines.¹⁴ Here is an excerpt from the latter:

Creator of the land, the water, and the sky, come and renew the face of the whole earth: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Giver of life, we are the sons and daughters of your holy breath; give us new purpose to care in love for the world of your making: O Lord, hear our prayer.

Saviour of the world, touch our lips in the power of your new creation, that we may proclaim your word of life: O Lord, hear our prayer.¹⁵

O God, the source of all life,
you have filled the earth with beauty.
Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works,
that rejoicing in your whole creation
we may learn to serve you with gladness,
for the sake of him through whom all things were made,
your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁶

O God of eternal light,
heaven and earth are the work of your hands
and all creation sings your praise and beauty.
As in the beginning, by your Spirit,
you gave life and order to all that is,
so by the same Spirit redeem us and all things,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁷

¹² Household Blessings and Prayers, 177
¹³ Ibid., 177
¹⁴ Occasional Services, 146, 175, 185
¹⁵ Ibid., 185
¹⁶ Ibid., 186-187
¹⁷ Ibid., 187
**Blessing of a family:** The Anglican Church's *Occasional Celebrations* also offers a particularly innovative Blessing of a Family among their "Blessings for the Created Order," for we humans too, are part of the created order. Hear the creation language in this excerpt:

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Blessed are you, Lord our God,
centre of being and source of life:
we give you thanks and praise
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We give you thanks for life and breath,
for eyes to see and ears to hear,
for touch and taste and warmth,
for food and shelter,
for minds to think and hearts to love."^{18}
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**Blessing of fisheries:** The Anglican Church offers creative innovations on other themes, as for example, this Blessing of Fisheries:

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Blessed are you, O God,
whose Spirit hovered over the deep
and filled it with all manner of living things.
May the sea continue to teem with abundant life.
May those who move upon the face of the waters
rejoice in its beauty, and find safety in its perils.
May Christ, who calmed the storm,
and filled the nets of his disciples,
bring us all to the harbour of light and peace. Amen."^{19}
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**A rich tradition:** Having reviewed the church's sacramentals, it is clear that we enjoy a rich tradition of blessings related to creation. In spite of this apparent diversity, what must be acknowledged, however, is the comparative sparseness of prayers of this type and breadth in our own liturgical era when compared with other eras. One must wonder if it is indicative of a society and church less cognizant of its deep interdependence with nature than once was the case.

**Contemporary prayers:** On the positive side, one must also acknowledge the popularity of books of prayer like Edward Hays' *Prayers For Planetary Pilgrims*,^{20} which are very attentive to creation. It may be argued that some of the greatest potential for developing an ecologically conscious spirituality rests with such variations on the sacramentals and rogation days. The inbuilt flexibility of such rituals for designing prayer which suits local needs lends itself to adaptation by ordinary Christians who often marvel at the ordinary, but find few words with which to express it.

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^{18} *Ibid.*, 146-147
^{19} *Ibid.*, 168
^{20} (Easton: Forest of Peace Books 1989)
Creation and the Environment of Worship

In Chile: Several years ago I had the opportunity of meeting the Mapuche of south-central Chile, just hours out of Santiago. I drove out from Temuco with an anthropologist who was part of the Indigenous Institute, an archdiocesan-sponsored support team made up of a community health nurse, a literacy worker, two agriculturalists and my host, Roberto. I had been invited to sit in on one of their regular community meetings.

Fierce lovers of the land: On the drive over near-impassable, deeply rutted roads and wooded, gently rolling hills, we fell to discussing the spirituality of this people. The Mapuche call themselves gente de la tierra or “people of the earth,” because they are lovers of the land, small farmers, shearers and orchard keepers. The Spanish called them araucano because of their bravery in battle: “brave and fierce” warriors. They are really both: fierce lovers of the land.

Worship under the sky: When I asked Roberto about their spiritual traditions, he was emphatic in his response: “These people don’t worship in churches under roofs. Their temple is the open sky, the grass and the wide open spaces.”

Interconnectedness: We arrived at a round parish mission church, constructed from wood sacred to the Mapuche, the el rehue, a hardwood not unlike oak. Both the shape and the actual construction material mirror the Mapuche sense of peoplehood, of relationship, of church, oneness and interconnectedness with the earth; an “at homeness” not often found in North American churches. For the next two or three hours we sat in the womb of this space and discussed the needs of the community: elders, youth, men and women, the animals, the trees and the land.

The context for liturgy: As a North American this encounter raised the question: What does it mean to take the cosmos as our context for doing liturgy? Perhaps we need to re-examine our entire notion of community. Perhaps we need to be prepared to ask who is assembled for worship. If we are to imagine ourselves and the earth as a “single sacred community” as Thomas Berry suggests, then we may need to find ways of bringing the earth inside church buildings. Even though we say that church is not a building but network of relationships, the walls do indeed provide a mental if not a physical barrier to realizing that creation worships with us. Indeed, we might ask how we can incorporate this very deep biblical notion into our liturgies. We may also need to find ways to go out more to creation as a worshipping community.

Processions out of doors: While the rubrics make provision for Palm Sunday and Easter Vigil processions to begin out-of-doors, weather permitting, rarely are

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Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth* (Mystic: Twenty-third Publications 1991) 43
the implication of this setting pointed out. In a similar vein, though, processions at planting and harvest are still observed in some rural communities, but these seasonal rites of passage are almost lost on city dwellers. Urban congregations might explore the possibility of twinning with a rural parish once or twice a year for this purpose. They might also initiate blessings of their own, for example for parish vegetable gardens.

**Microcosm of the cosmos:** There is much we could learn about sacred space from our Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian sister churches. In the Eastern Christian tradition, the church building itself is no less than a microcosm of the cosmos:

> The dome... suggests that you enter a transfigured world when you enter the church... the church is a dwelling place in which all that is real is shown forth... In it all things are united and all things are revealed in their fullness.²

**The icon screen:** In Eastern churches the icon screen links the key elements of Christian faith: Christ, Mary, "the saints and the angels, with creation."³ Though Western Christianity may be less developed in this regard, even here certain subtle connections with the natural world are sought and even encouraged.

**In Environment and Art in Catholic Worship,** published in 1978, the US Catholic bishops, following on the direction of Vatican II, took on the challenge of rediscovering and recommending a return to the essence of our root liturgical symbols: bread and wine, water, oil, laying on of hands (i.e., human touch), "so we can experience them as authentic and appreciate their symbolic value."⁴ They suggested, for example, simple initiatives like the introduction of the common cup and the use of more authentic bread in eucharistic celebrations. (n 87)

**Links with the natural world:** Along with the recovery of central symbols, this document highlights the advantages of metaphor and artform in worship, elements, as it were, with links in the world itself, including the natural world. (n 2) They note that many biblical encounters with God took place in the context of creation:

> Flood, fire, the rock, the sea, the mountain, the cloud, the political situation and institutions of succeeding periods – in all of them Israel touched the face of God. (n 2)

**Involving the whole person:** The US bishops argued that liturgy demands nothing less than the involvement of the total person and as such requires full human expression:

> Like the covenant itself, the liturgical celebrations of the faith community [Church] involve the whole person... calling on all human faculties: body, mind, senses, imaginations, emotions, memory. (n 35). ... Attention to these is one of the urgent needs of contemporary liturgical renewal. (n 5)

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³ Ibid., 77
The nonrational elements of liturgy: In giving reasons for this approach it is interesting to note the similarity of the bishops’ arguments to those of contemporary proponents of a more ecological spirituality.⁵

In view of our culture’s emphasis on reason, it is critically important for the Church to reemphasize a more total approach to the human person by opening up and developing the nonrational elements of liturgy: the concern for feelings of conversion, support, joy, repentance, trust, love, memory, movement, gesture, wonder. (n 35)

Appeal to the senses: They suggest, for example, that banners ought to be viewed as opportunities “to appeal to the senses and thereby create an atmosphere and a mood,” in forms, colors and textures, rather than as “signboards,” slogans or verbal messages. (n 100) They also propose that ritual objects, besides being functional, ought to be “capable of making a visual or other sensory contribution to the beauty of the action” (n 84) since beauty in “environment and... artifacts, movements and appeals to the senses,” are especially important “in a world dominated by science and technology.” (n 34)

Principles of quality and appropriateness alongside the measures of beauty and dignity are stressed over and over again in the selection of objects, images, materials and furnishings of all sorts. (n 19) The bishops recommend a handcrafted quality which bears the mark of human creativity; they caution against the use of mass-produced items.

Dignity and beauty of materials used, in design and form, in color and texture—these are the concerns of artists for their work. . . and are not, unfortunately, the evident concerns of many mass manufacturers and merchandisers. (n 67)

Natural materials are best: For the altar, the ambo, the tabernacle, the cross, plates and chalices, flagons and all other vessels, candlesticks, books and vestments, adjectives like “solid”, “of fine materials”, “carefully proportioned”, are frequent (nn 72, 74, 80). Natural materials are best, particularly those of local origin. Overall, these ritual objects and furnishings, when taken together “should possess a unity and harmony with each other and the architecture of the place.” (n 67)

Natural creation: The bishops go on to cite natural creation, “genuine... flowers, plants and trees” as a “particularly apt” model for liturgical decoration “since they are of nature, always discreet in their message, never cheap or tawdry or ill made.” (n 102) Always conscious of our need for context, for relevance to place, for use of the elements, the bishops also suggest a space for gathering before and after worship, that in some climates “might be outdoors.” (n 54) Again, nature is the most graceful bearer of grace.

The skin for liturgy: These bishops choose an interesting metaphor for the liturgical space itself, the housing over all of these activities. They call it “the ‘skin’ for a liturgical action,” likening it not inconsequentially to a body, that

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⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Matthew Fox, Original Blessing (Santa Fe: Bear & Co. 1983) 282-284; 287-292; also, Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: Fortress 1987) 125-155
allows for as much freedom of movement, as much ease and creativity in expression as any body. They give no one model, “look” or blueprint for design, only this, that “its integrity, simplicity and beauty, its physical location and landscaping should take into account the neighborhood, city and area in which it is built.” (n 42)

Close to the garden: Again, this attention to context, the importance of environment, human and nonhuman, natural and cultural, is not isolated. In describing the ideal space for a eucharistic chapel, Environment and Art in Catholic Worship recommends that it “should offer easy access from the porch areas, garden or street as well as the main space.” (n 79) The access advised is, I would suggest, as symbolic as it is practical. eucharist in its full mystery cannot be understood apart from the “garden, the street or the porch,” since it brings us in touch with our own inner space, our neighbor, and the created world, when it is done well, or as the US bishops have said, with authenticity.

Bodily movement: Finally, in this “skin” of skins, this body of bodies, the bishops are careful to include the natural grace of the human body: “Beyond seeing what is done,” good liturgy ought to allow space for the ritual action to unfold, space that facilitates “processions and . . . interpretations through bodily movement (dance). . . .” (n 59) The design of the space, the arrangement of seating and even the function of the furniture itself ought to facilitate and not inhibit “gracefulness . . . surety . . . freedom” (n 59) and “ease of movement.” (n 62)

The place of the human body in ritual expression and the people of God as concelebrants of the eucharist, are the principal reasons why, for example, Eastern churches traditionally do not house pews.6 The body is the metaphor, the language, the bearer of the human, the nephesh. The embodied person is the “living being.”

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6 Goa, “Liturgical Space,” 77
Liturgical Renewal
Past and Future

Adrien Nocent

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy, the following editorial appeared in the international liturgical journal, Ecclesia Orans. Its author is a distinguished liturgist, professor at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome, and editor of Ecclesia Orans. He may be best known to English-speaking Catholics through his four volume work, The Liturgical Year. His editorial speaks with wisdom and insight to some of our continuing issues with respect to liturgical renewal in the church, and Father Nocent has graciously given permission to reprint it in the Bulletin.

December 4th, 1993 will mark the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium. As is fitting, liturgical reviews everywhere will be publishing numerous articles on the subject attempting to assess its significance. From its first publication in 1984 Ecclesia Orans has repeatedly treated the topic and will not ignore this opportunity to once again address its importance.

Not everyone will recall this important moment in Vatican II in the same way. Some will view its promulgation as a crucial and altogether felicitous turning point for the life of the Church. Others, however, will choose to lament it as a form of collective aberration by a majority of the Council Fathers. For these it may seem a betrayal of a tradition which would become the source of all the present difficulties of the Church. A lengthy list of abuses, in which they may take private satisfaction, in their opinion is the only result of this unfortunate decree. Such as these accept no consolation, preferring to withdraw into their gloom; still they will pay the price of refusing to accept the facts of history, even as they fantasize an heroic witch hunt for heretics.

We, however, believe that we should be grateful to the Lord and to all of those who have worked for the renewal of the liturgy. They tried, as objectively as they could, to put at the service of the Faith and of life the accumulated results of historical and scientific research stretching back to the beginnings of the liturgical movement. Pace those who in their anger or ignorance say otherwise, an objective judgement of the renewal would conclude that it is based on competent scholarship, as well as on the teaching of the Church and its liturgical traditions. The same could not be said of earlier periods, including the time of Trent, simply because scholars at that period did not have at their disposal the

1 Editorial, Ecclesia Orans 10 (1993) 3-5
2 Ecclesia Orans may be ordered from: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Amministrazione, Via Porta Lavennale 19, 00153 Roma, Italia. Annual subscription price is 45,000 lire (US $43).
3 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1977)
plentiful editions of ancient texts and the academic tools now readily available to even the most uninspired student. It would be historical and disrespectful to accuse our predecessors of prejudice and ignorance at a time when the Church found itself in tragic circumstances. What they did, they did well, given the possibilities and the urgent necessities of their day.

Recognizing, objectively, the advanced level of studies on which the present renewal is based, we also acknowledge that a lasting debt of gratitude is due a long series of discoveries and scientific studies which opened the door to new possibilities. Even an amateur student of liturgy would be able to cite numerous examples.

While we may acknowledge that, on the whole, the renewal has been indeed a positive one, dare we say that there are no problems? To close our eyes to existent difficulties would manifest an unwholesome bias, lacking in serious depth, and as unhelpful as a one-sided condemnation. The wholesale canonization of what has transpired ill serves the Church and opens the door to another attack of liturgical sclerosis. We must not allow ourselves either an unqualified admiration of the work which has been accomplished, or a wholesale resistance to all efforts at improvement. More devastating still would be an attempt to block, on principle, liturgical adaptation, all the while taking refuge in a sterile ceremonial formalism.

We have nothing but the highest regard for those who from our perspective have laboured so diligently for renewal and, without going into detail, we gladly accord them all due honor and respect. But precisely because they themselves are critically intelligent they need be keenly aware of certain defects in their work.

Could anyone honestly say that the Ordo Missae is without problems? Is the Lectionary beyond reproach? Are the two epicleses all that they could be? Are all the prayers of equal merit? Is the translation of the euchology the only possible one, or might we ask if those same ideas could not be better expressed according to the understanding of the people who are going to pray them? Has the rite of a sacrament, such as Confirmation, been organically constructed, without internal contradictions? Who would not be astonished to see evidence of the duality which the Praenotanda established and carries through in the Ritual? It seems to us this calls for a great deal of improvement.

This is not intended as an accusation but rather an acknowledgement that it was not possible, 25 years ago, to do always what should have been done. Thanks to a certain progression in thought more seems possible today. We are not speaking of setting up an agenda, but of destroying the myth of a renewal accomplished "once and for all." This tendency does exist. It is inherent in our human condition, since it is far easier to rest on one's laurels rather than undertake the burdensome research necessary for further progress.

The blame is widespread. It has nothing to do with the Constitution itself but rather with the way in which it was implemented. It is not too late to address what may be considered a flaw, and this examination of conscience can assist us in avoiding repetition of the same mistake once again. Everyone involved in the press of pastoral problems is subject to such a temptation.

In our view a great number of people regret what can be called a tactical error: renewal was often imposed without any preparation, in a great hurry, and without sufficient catechesis. The rallying cry was, "Strike while the iron is hot!"
To have taken the time necessary to train was to slam on the brakes. With our “20-20 hindsight” we can see what happened. The implementation of the renewal went forward without sufficient effort to change people’s attitudes. It is the work of a few hours to change regulations on paper; it often requires a century to change minds. We must admit that the task is not yet accomplished. Let us change nothing without giving reasons and detailed explanations lest we repeat the same mistakes in the future.

This said, we raise paeans of praise for the tremendous good that has been accomplished; let us be done with seeing danger around every corner.

There is no article in this review [that is, Ecclesia Orans] which does not intend to make its contribution toward knowledge and understanding. Our fondest hope is to open the door ever wider to progress in the true Tradition, which far surpasses all other traditions.

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Nicene Creed

In its publication, *Praying Together,* the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) has provided helpful notes on the texts of many commonly used liturgical prayers. Here we print their notes on the text of the Nicene Creed. Copyright © 1988 by the English Language Liturgical Consultation. Excerpted by permission of the publisher, Abingdon Press.

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],  
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Creed called "Nicene" or the Creed of Nicaea and Constantinople is first known in its present form from the Council of Chalcedon (451), where it was accepted as the Creed of the Council of Constantinople (381). That Council is recorded simply as having confirmed the Nicene faith. The Council of Nicaea (325)

¹ (Nashville: Abingdon 1988) 23-28
framed its own statement of orthodox belief, stressing that the Son is of the same essential Being (homoousios) as the Father, against the Arian heretics who allotted the Son a lower rank. The original Nicene statement differs considerably from the one recognized at Chalcedon. The latter, our "Nicene Creed," appears to be based on an earlier baptismal creed possibly from Jerusalem or Antioch, and, in addition to the essential clauses from Nicaea, it incorporated material to combat later heresies.

Representing the statement of an ecumenical council, the Creed was naturally framed in the first-person plural, "we believe." This plural use is not only original, but is also appropriate in corporate worship. The reference is to the faith of the whole Church, of all times and places, and not only to that of the local congregation. This is in contrast to the Apostles' Creed, which began as a personal profession of faith. The liturgical use of the singular "I believe" is, of course, a legitimate variation found both in the East and in the West. It may date back to the widespread use of this Creed for baptismal profession before its incorporation into the eucharistic liturgy. Its use in the Eucharist apparently began in Antioch in the late fifth century as a way of ensuring the orthodox belief of the communicants and later spread in the West, but was not introduced in Rome until 1014.

**Line 1.** "the Almighty." The addition of "the" brings out the significance of the Greek pantocrator, which is a noun and not an adjective. In Revelation 1.8, 4.8 it renders the Hebrew Sabaoth of Isaiah 6.3 and expresses God's sovereign power.

**Line 4.** "seen and unseen." This refers to "heaven and earth" (that is, the whole created universe) in the previous line and not to some further acts of creation. While the reference thus includes the angels, it does not preclude the notion that further creative processes may be part of the divine plan. A comma has been introduced after "is" for greater clarity, to indicate that what follows is an expansion of "all that is."

**Line 5.** "We believe." The repetition of this phrase, clearly implied by the sense, is found in several early creeds.

**Lines 6-10.** "begotten." This word appears three times in the Greek to describe the Son's unique relationship with the Father, as distinct from the process of physical birth. The Latin text dropped the formal equivalent (genitum) in line 7, and has naturam ex Patre ("born of the Father"), which seems less appropriate than the use of natus with Maria in the Apostles' Creed. It was thought sufficient to use "begotten" twice in English: it was dropped in line 6 as unnecessary and retained in line 7 to distinguish the truth conveyed by the Greek from any idea that the Son was created in time, or alternatively born in eternity.

**Lines 7-23.** In the original Greek the verbs in this section are expressed as a long series of participles which describe our Lord as one who is begotten (gennethenta) of the Father, descended (katelthonta) from heaven, made flesh (sarkothenta), became a human being (enanthropesanta), crucified (stauron­tha), suffered (pathonta), buried (taphenta), risen (anastanta), ascended (anelthonta), sitting (kathezomenon), and coming (erchomenon). This sustained series could not be reproduced in the Latin version, nor can it be rendered satisfactorily in English. It has, however, influenced the handling of lines 14-16 as a closely linked sequence.

**Line 7.** "eternally begotten." This phrase represents one of the statements in the original Creed of Nicaea that were specifically anti-Arian, directed against
the assertion that the Son came into being at a certain time and only the Father existed from all eternity. (See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2nd ed [New York: Harper & Row 1960], p 243, and *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed [London: Longman 1972], p 238.) In the preparation of the ICET\(^2\) translation philosophical objections were made to an earlier proposal, “before time began,” while the older phrase “before all worlds” was thought to be archaic and obscure. A question has been raised whether the translation should read “begotten from” to represent the Greek *ek*, as in lines 8 and 9. It was finally decided that the English idiom “begotten of” more accurately represented the intimacy of the original.

**Line 8.** “God from God.” The use of the preposition “from” makes for a clearer as well as a more literal translation of the Greek *ek*. This phrase, repeated more fully in the next line, is retained to conform with the usual Latin and English versions. The fullness of expression also appears in the Greek texts of the Creed of Nicaea, but “God from God” is absent in the Greek text of the Chalcedonian formulation used in the liturgy. (See Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, edition XXXVI [Freiburg: Herder 1976], nn 125, 180; also *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* [Basel, 1962], p 20.)

**Line 11.** The crucial Nicaean term *homoousios* is difficult to translate, but “Being” seems preferable to “nature” or “essence” in a statement which tries to express the unity of the Godhead. The technical term “substance” has confusing materialistic overtones in modern English, “Being,” here with a capital letter to indicate that this is a noun referring to the uncreated Being of the Godhead, comes nearest to the literal meaning of the Greek philosophical term. The argument of the sentence is that because the Son is not made but begotten, he shares the same uncreated Being as the Father.

**Line 12.** The separation of this line and the use of “him” rather than the relative “whom” shows that the line refers to the Son and not to the Father, and that he is the Father’s agent in creation (John 1.3 and Hebrews 1.2).

**Line 13.** The omission of the generic “men” (Greek *anthropous*, Latin *hombres*) in apposition to “us” may appear to weaken slightly the sense of the original, but this was considered less serious than insisting on a term which is increasingly misleading or excluding as tied to only one gender. A suggested alternative, “for us all,” was rejected because of a colloquial tendency in some places to attach “all” to virtually every plural pronoun, which would diminish the force of “us” as representing the whole human race.

**Lines 15 and 16.** These lines have been completely recast from the ICET version in favor of a fresh translation from the Greek. The new form of indentation makes it clear that the whole of our Lord’s redemptive work was for the salvation of the human race.

**Line 15.** “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.” The Greek original (*ek Pneumatos hagiou kai Marias tes parthenou*) uses only one preposition *ek* (literally “out of” or “from”) in relation to both the Holy Spirit and our

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\(^2\) ICET stands for International Consultation on English Texts. It was the predecessor of ELLC, and produced the English version of the Nicene Creed now in common liturgical use. This was published in *Prayers We Have In Common* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1975).
Lord’s mother. In English renderings of the Creed, however, the traditional idiom has long been “incarnate of,” which the Consultation has decided to retain. An objection to “from” in English is that it tends to suggest too slight a role for Mary, as a mere channel, in the work of redemption. For a similar reason it was decided to drop the ICET phrase “by the power of the Holy Spirit.” . . . . The received Latin version of the Creed makes a distinction in the prepositions used of the Spirit (de Spiritu Sancto, “by the Holy Spirit”) and the Virgin (ex Maria Virgine, “of or from the Virgin Mary”), but examination of earlier Latin forms of the Creed shows that this was at first a variant without significance and may even have arisen from a scribal error (reading ex for et). There is an interesting and learned note in Pearson’s Exposition of the Creed (originally published 1659, ed. James Nichols, London 1854), page 242, showing the inadequacy of the supposed distinction between de and ex to express what some have taken it to express, namely a difference between the efficient and the material cause. In the Vulgate version of the New Testament de is used, where the Greek original has ek, of both the Virgin (Galatians 4.4) and the Spirit (Matthew 1.20). The Consultation believes that its version of line 15 accurately represents the original text. The Latin text might be rendered “by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary” but this runs the risk of wrongly suggesting “Mary’s Holy Spirit” without making it clear what the respective roles of Mary and the Spirit are. The Creed wants to make it clear that Jesus, the incarnate Son, is completely God and completely human and that the operation of both the Virgin and the Spirit were equally essential. According to Diogenes, bishop of Cyzicus, speaking at Chalcedon, this clause was added to the original Nicaean formulation to guard against Apollinarianism (a refusal to admit the completeness of the Lord’s humanity). For a critical discussion of this, see J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Creeds, pages 333-337.

Line 16. “became truly human.” The Consultation faced great difficulty in adequately rendering ananthropesanta (literally “inhumaned,” see Denzinger-Schönmetzer, editio XXXVI, n 150 where a literal version from the original Greek is given as inhumanatus est). In the original sequence of participles (see above on lines 7-23) this one has a pivotal place in making a link between our Lord’s taking flesh and the reality of his suffering and death. It does not represent a further stage in time beyond the incarnation, but spells out clearly the meaning of the incarnation. In some old versions of the Creed (see, for instance, Denzinger-Schönmetzer, editio XXXVI, n 44) enanthropesanta was spelled out even more fully: “that is, taking on a complete human person, soul and body and mind and all things that belong to a human being apart from sin.” The Consultation believed that the sense was best captured by “became truly human.” It rejected a suggestion that the text should read “and became human,” as this, in common speech, implies something quite different, a change from severity to kindness. Some would have preferred to keep “and became man” as showing the particularity of the incarnation in a male person, Jesus. The Consultation rejected this as misrepresenting what the Creed affirms at this point. Neither the Greek anthropos nor the Latin homo carry male overtones as “man” in contemporary English normally does.

Line 18. “suffered death.” The Greek pathonta carries the notions of both suffering and death. (See Christine Mohrmann, Études sur le latin des Chrétiens [Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958], 1.210, on passio.) It can also be reasonably argued that a reference to “death” as in the Apostles’ Creed, provides a necessary link between “suffered” and “buried.”
Line 20. "in accordance with the Scriptures." For *kata tas graphas* (1 Corinthians 15.4) "in accordance with" was felt to be closer to the sense than "according to." The latter might suggest that Scripture says one thing, while other authorities say something different. The Scriptures referred to are the Old Testament, as in the appeals to Scripture in, for example, Acts 2.25-28; 13.34-35.

Line 21. "he ascended." See the note on line 10 of the Apostles Creed.3

Line 22. "is seated." This is preferred to "sits," to emphasize the permanence of Christ's position of honor.

Line 25. "the Lord, the giver of life." These are two distinct phrases, both applying to the Holy Spirit. They avoid the possible misunderstanding of the older version, "the Lord and giver," which might be taken to mean "the Lord of life" and "the giver of life."

Lines 26-28. These lines have been recast to follow the original texts more closely and also to avoid referring unnecessarily to the Holy Spirit as "he."

Line 26. "[and the Son]." The square brackets are not meant to be reproduced in liturgical forms. They are an indication that each Church must decide whether or not to include the words. The word *Filioque*, which was a controversial Western addition to the Creed, originating in Toledo in 589 and not accepted in Rome until after 1000, has been translated within the brackets but it is left to individual Churches to decide whether or not to include it in their official orders of service. It was not within the province of the Consultation to recommend either its excision or retention. It should be noted, however, that those who strongly favor retention of the *Filioque* are often thinking of the Trinity as revealed and active in human affairs, whereas the original Greek text is concerned about relationships within the Godhead itself. As with many historic disputes, the two parties may not be discussing the same thing.

Line 28. In the ICET version, "Prophets" was capitalized. The word has now been given a lower-case p in correction of an oversight or printing error.

Line 29. "We believe in one holy . . . ." This phrase illustrates the need of reference to the Greek original, even for translation of the Latin. The latter here omits the preposition "in," which can be readily understood from line 25 and the use of the accusative case *unam sanctam...ecclesiam*. In the Greek *eis mian* clearly requires "believe in" the Church, as well as "in God" and "in Christ." Some Western Fathers argued from the Latin text that belief in the Church is of a different order from belief in God (see Rufinus in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* [Paris, 1844-1904], 21.373 and Venantius Fortunatus, ibid, 88:350-51.) Notice the indentation of this line, in subordination to "We believe in the Holy Spirit."

3 The ELLC commentary on the Apostles' Creed will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin.
Irene Nowell, Sing a New Song. The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1993) 303 pages

Far less has been published about the responsorial psalms than about the scripture readings in the new lectionary. We now have a rich resource that fills this gap. Irene Nowell, a Benedictine sister, teaches at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, and at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. In this book she first briefly considers the functions of the responsorial psalms as they are used in the lectionary. She then groups the psalms according to their literary genre: historical psalms, laments, songs of Thanksgiving, psalms of confidence, hymns, liturgical psalms, wisdom psalms, royal (messianic) psalms, songs of Zion, and the canticles.

Each psalm is then discussed as a whole, and then the verses selected for liturgical use on particular Sundays and feasts are considered by themselves. The relationship of the psalm and the verses used in the lectionary to the scripture readings are discussed at length. The author brings the most up to date scholarship on the psalms to their use in the eucharistic liturgy.

This is a must! Some will use it for personal meditation, study, and preparation for the Sunday liturgy. Others will find it helpful for preaching and discerning the relationship between the psalms and not only the first reading, but all of the readings. Musicians will find it useful as well.


The author believes that it is important that godparents take their ministry seriously; children need caring godparents. Elaine Ramshaw, a Lutheran lay woman, is associate professor of pastoral care at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. She offers sound and practical advice for godparents at around the time of baptism, for godparents of adult children, and all ages in between. She considers remembering baptism, giving presents, praying for godchildren, sharing thoughts and values, making Sunday special, keeping the church year, and godparenting in times of crisis. Every page contains helpful suggestions, one hundred thirteen in all. Parishes will want to recommend that parents give copies to prospective godparents, or may give it as a parish gift. Churches and church book stores will want to keep it in stock.


More must reading for liturgists, and a possible text for students of liturgy. The author received his doctorate at The Catholic University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, and is now professor of liturgy at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia; he is the author of a number of previous books and articles. Gordon Lathrop is a profound thinker, always searching for the heart of the matter; he writes simply and beautifully. The book is rooted in the early history of Christian liturgy, but is also attentive to contemporary tensions and questions; both basic principles and highly practical matters are considered. The author keeps the central liturgical symbols - assembly, water, bread and wine - truly central and considers them from a variety of angles and points of view. This is an ecumenical book, affirming the ecumenical-liturgical consensus that brings many churches closer together in our times; it also challenges some practices and traditions of churches and local congregations, when the author feels they give too much attention to secondary matters and fail to respect the central symbols.

Holy Things is divided into three parts. The first section considers the basic patterns of Christian worship, especially word, baptism and eucharist. The second looks at what we actually do, focusing on the symbols themselves. The third section is called "applications - pastoral liturgical theology." A theme that runs throughout the book is that of "juxtaposition." Lathrop explains:
The Sunday meeting of Christians, no matter what the denominational tradition, has focused around certain things: primarily a book, a water pool, bread and wine on a table; and secondarily fire, oil, clothing, a chair, images, musical instruments. These things are intentionally not static, but take on meaning in action as they are used, especially as they are intentionally juxtaposed. Even the assembly itself, the place of those juxtapositions, may be regarded as a thing...

Joan Halmo, Medieval Office Antiphons for the Paschal Triduum-Easter, PhD. Dissertation (The Catholic University of America 1993)

Congratulations to Joan Halmo of Saskatoon for completing her doctorate in musicology. She examined antiphons for the Paschal Triduum and Easter Sunday in twelve manuscripts of the 10th to 13th centuries—some of our earliest records of these liturgical texts. Texts and music were analyzed and compared, sources were identified, and additional information regarding the development of the liturgies for these days was discerned. The antiphons for the Triduum proper were relatively constant, indicating the existence of a widespread tradition even by the 10th century. In contrast, those for Easter Sunday were relatively variable, suggesting that these liturgies were still in the process of development.


This book intends to present a "...holistic vision of how to do youth evangelization and ministry." It also offers 'strategies and internal disciplines' for youth ministry in many settings. Brennan's concept of youth ministry is expressed as FLAME: Friendship, Leadership, Acceptance, Ministry and Education, which he sees as the essential components of 'full-cycle youth evangelization'.

There is much of value in this book: good ideas, helpful language, useful information. That is really the problem: there is far too much in this 98 page book. Summarizing the main themes of many writers in many different fields, addressing briefly the major problems which afflict young people in our world today, and describing some of the central issues in the life of the church in the 1990s is all important. It is all available elsewhere, however, and including it here makes it difficult to find the essential points Fr. Brennan would make about youth ministry. The concept of full-cycle evangelization is a life-giving concept for the entire church, and deserves to be presented more clearly, so that it can be understood, and discussed.

{Review by Marilyn Sweet, Director of Liturgy, Archdiocese of Halifax.}

Brief Book Notices


LTP has reprinted five of the addresses given at the Twentieth Annual Conference of the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, held in June 1991

The volume provides the substance to analyze and review critically the place of children in the liturgy of the assembly and the many practices that have been evolved over the years. Is the Sunday Assembly of the Eucharist truly inclusive when we consis-
tently separate them from the main assembly? Do we value the giftedness of children when we do not worship with them? Thought provoking questions?

Authors include John Brooks-Leonard, Paul Philibert, Mark Searle, Gertrud Mueller Nelson, Linda Gaupin and Joan Patano Vos.


In addition to gain insight from the experience of Christian Initiation, the process of reflecting theologically is also important to keep experience on the track of tradition. This is the service that Donald L. Gelpi provides, not only for adult conversion and initiation (vol I) but also for the sacraments of ongoing conversion (vol II).

An important feature of the volumes is the author's ability to unite experience and theology. Although not the easiest to read in sections, the systematic treatment is clear and to the point.


A long overlooked, yet essential subject is the role of the assembly in the process of Christian initiation, both as the subject of liturgy and as being converted itself within the process of conversion.

Written in very readable style the author explores the full responsibility of the assembly in the 1988 introduction and texts of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.


This book contains many beautiful reflections, especially linking scripture-to-the-Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Although addressed to those who are catechumens, there is a danger that some will use this book as a substitute for the personal storytelling and sharing that is part of the catechumenate and that the process of conversion is mainly a rational and intellectual process of knowing the rites.

This book may have a lot to offer for the period of mystagogy, of reflecting back on the experience of initiation.


The subject of confirmation is of interest and a subject of discussion in both Canada and the United States. Paul Turner offers an overview of many significant texts from the Fathers of the Church to the Reformers.

This work offers short quotations in five general areas: Rituals and Candidates; Theological Reflections; Ritual Means; The Reconciliation of Heretics.


In the opening chapter, James Dunning reminds us of the radicalness of conversion, not changing churches, but "personal surrender to God revealed in a crucified Jesus and present in a risen Christ, who, through the Spirit in the community, called Christians to make his journey through death to life."

Conversion is just as real a journey as in the age of martyrdom, except our journey today is away from instant gratification to a death which is the gateway to life.

This volume will help catechists, religious educators and liturgists "to look over the fence" and see the gifts that each can bring to the process of conversion.
The author inserts conversation starters that help to open God's word for those who will preach and catechize during the catechumenate.


This small booklet examines the history and significance of the introductory rites of the Mass. The authors take a practical look at some sample gathering rites, offering detailed suggestions about music and ritual.


Noted scholar, Robert Taft, outlines for western Catholics a brief history of the origins and evolution of the Byzantine Liturgy. Complete with endnotes for each chapter, Taft helps the reader understand the origins of the liturgy of Constantinople.


With much interest in liturgies of the word with children, this volume presents a good guide to homiletics for children. The first section treats the spiritual life of children; part two deals with the principles of homiletics for children; and the third with the practice.


This companion volume To Walk with a Child, deals more specifically with liturgies of the word and comes at an important time when practice calls for reflection on what and how we celebrate with children. Liturgy is not catechesis, so how do we celebrate, what are the principles behind ritual and prayer? This book explores the art of celebrating with children.


Each year LTP publishes notes on the Church Year for Children in a take-home note style to be photocopied for parish or school contents.


This is the third in the series which examines the liturgical traditions of Jewish and Christian worship. Volume Three treats the history, development, current practices, composition and critical views of both traditions.

The contributors trace Jewish music from its place in Hebrew Scriptures through the nineteenth century Reform movement. Similar accounts of Christian music describe its growth up to the Protestant Reformation, as well as post-Reformation developments. Other essays explore liturgical music in contemporary North America by analyzing it against the backdrop of continuous social change that characterizes our era.

Readers will appreciate the non-technical style of the book which makes it easy to read for non-musicians.


This publication is a collection of studies on sacramental theology and practice, presented by colleagues and students to noted theologian and teacher, David N. Power, OMI. Topics include Contemporary Mystagogia; the Sacraments, Interiority, and Spiritual Direction; the Need for Post-Conciliar Devotion. Contributors include Michael Downey, Regis A. Duffy, OFM, Joseph J. Fortuna, Richard Fragomeni, Kevin W. Irwin and others.

This collection of studies, presented to noted author H. Boone Porter, is based on the general theme of creation. Contributions consider creation in the history of liturgy, in theology, and in the life of the Church. Topics include the Creation Theme in Eucharistic Prayer; the Care of the Earth as a Paradigm for the Treatment of the Eucharistic Elements; New Beginnings and Church Dedications. Contributors include: Paul F. Bradshaw, Reginald H. Fuller, Aidan Kavanagh, OSB, Leonel L. Mitchell, Thomas Talley, Louis Weil.


This purse/pocket size booklet is the eighth in LTP's series of prayer books for those who wish to pray for the needs of the Church and the world.

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