

Orthodoxy in America

LECTURE SERIES

LITURGICAL HUMANISM: ORTHODOXY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE

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Archbishop Rowan Williams

Fordham is proud to honor Rowan Williams, the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury and one of the foremost theologians and committed ecumenical leaders of our time.

As Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012, he served as the senior bishop of the worldwide Anglican Communion, a “first among equals” of fellow bishops, and led the Church of England together with the Archbishop of York. He brought to his ministry a deep knowledge of and respect for Christian traditions, and a conviction of their unity with one another in Christ. During his tenure, he used his immense gifts as an ecumenical leader to nurture Anglican relationships with other church leaders—particularly Catholics and Orthodox Christians—both worldwide and at home. In 2012 he stepped down as archbishop to return to the University of Cambridge, his *alma mater*, where he is currently the Master of Magdalene College.

Born into a Welsh-speaking family in South Wales in 1950, Archbishop Williams studied theology at Christ’s College Cambridge. His interest in Russia began in his teens, with Russian novels and composers, and soon grew to include religion and philosophy, particularly the notion of “personalism,” which he called a fascination “with the unfathomable in each person.” He earned a doctorate in theology at Wadham College, Oxford, in 1975. His dissertation on Vladimir Lossky, one of the most influential Orthodox theologians of the 20th century, set him on a path to become one of the leading experts in contemporary Orthodox Christianity. His subsequent writings on the patristic tradition and contemporary Orthodox theology solidified that distinction. Of the archbishop’s 2008 critically acclaimed book, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright said readers will “return to Dostoevsky with new insight on what it means to be human, and above all, to sense the dark and urgent presence of the living God.”

Archbishop Williams is a prolific author, a noted poet, and a translator of poetry. Apart from Welsh, he speaks or reads nine other languages. His poems range from the devotional and religious to the spiritual and the secular. In his poem “Great Sabbath,” he writes, “The silence calms./ The morning’s news is plain; the centre space/ Is empty. Under the trees where he once stepped// It is for you to go.”

For his thoughtful faith, his prolific writings, and his tireless commitment to ecumenical dialogue, we, the President and Trustees of Fordham University, in solemn convocation assembled and in accord with the chartered authority bestowed on us by the Regents of the University of the State of New York, declare Archbishop Rowan Williams Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*. That he may enjoy all rights and privileges of this, our highest honor, we have issued these letters patent under our hand and the corporate seal of the University on this, the 30th day of September in the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Fourteen.

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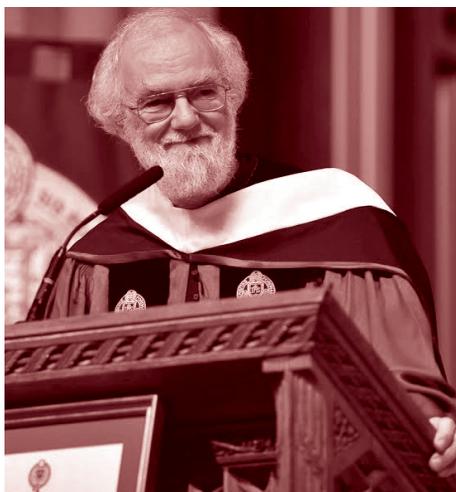
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104th Archbishop of Canterbury
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LITURGICAL HUMANISM

1.

“I must say as strongly as I can that what held me back from becoming a Christian was what seemed to me to be the absence of a real theology of freedom and a real theology of the Holy Spirit and of the experience of the Holy Spirit.”¹ Olivier Clement, one of modern Orthodoxy’s most distinctive and insightful thinkers, insists throughout his work that what is needed to address the spiritual poverty and banality of the modern West (and not only the West) is not more and better conceptual refinement in meeting atheist arguments, nor more and better programs for self-improvement with a “spiritual” gloss, nor more and better institutional solidarity. It is the experience of a distinct kind of humanness, in which the twin notions of liberty and personhood were credibly fleshed out. As he says elsewhere,² these twin notions are vital to any understanding of what *history* is; and he sees in much contemporary thought and practice what amounts to a denial of history and a nostalgia for a timeless, organic life—whether in struggles for an abstract equality, or in the reduction of human aspiration to a set of needs that can be filled moment by moment without reflection or self-scrutiny. The Christian revelation—and this includes the Jewish revolution of understanding that underlies it—is what makes history possible, because it speaks of a world both interrupted by the Word of God and transfigured in all its living complexity by the Word of God. What is claimed by Christians is that human existence is addressed by an act that is completely beyond the categories of nature, of repeatable process; so that our humanity is in turn taken beyond repeatable

1. Olivier Clement, *L'autre soleil*, Paris, Stock 1975 (henceforth AS), p. 128.

2. Olivier Clement, *La revolte de l'esprit* Paris, Stock 1979 (henceforth RE), p. 139 ff.; c.f. Clement, *Anachroniques*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer 1990, pp. 76-7 (henceforth An), *On Human Being: A Spiritual Anthropology*, translated by Jeremy Hummerstone, London/New York/Manila, New City, 2000 (henceforth OHB; ET of *Questions sur l'homme*, Sainte-Foy, Editions Anne Sigier 1986) chs 2 and 3.

process and made capable of responsibility in the strictest sense of the word—a capacity to *answer*, and so to be changed by a relation. “The meaning of history,” says Clement, “like the meaning of the human subject, is to be found beyond the limits of the world—but this is a ‘beyond’ that has, in the Incarnation, become interior to history and humanity... It is the death and resurrection of God made human that truly constitutes the End of history, or rather the End *in* history so that the word ‘End’ does not signify some kind of closure but an infinite opening, a threshold of light. This is an End that judges history’s totalitarian pretensions, its illusions and hypnoses; this End, we have argued, wounds history with the wound of eternity and opens up in it the path of repentance and so of hope.”³

The point is that revelation presupposes a God who is personal and free: if such a God engages us, addresses us, our human identity becomes something we don’t control. We are who we are because we are spoken to by an agent irreducibly and unimaginably other; to be human is to be summoned to answer. But this also means that to be human is to be summoned to “communion”: there is no life for us without that awareness of and coming to terms with the call to answer to, and for, what is not ourselves. Every other person is the object of God’s free address, and to look at the face of a human other is to look at a reality that is the focus of an infinite attention. In the light of revelation we see human faces for the first time.⁴ The ‘humanism’ to which the Christian rightly lays claim is a vision of every human face as the focus of self-forgetting love; so that there is no conditionality about human worth or dignity, no more or less that depends on status, achievement, age, race or whatever. The invitation to engage with the act of love that has eternally engaged me is at the same time the invita-

3. RE, p. 141; for one of Clement’s fullest discussions of a theology of history, see his *Transfigurer le temps: Notes sur le temps a la lumiere de la tradition orthodoxe*, Neuchatel, Delachaux et Niestle 1959, especially Part II, and chapter 5 of Part III.

4. OHB, p. 55; c.f. OHB, ch 5 and RE, pp. 63 ff, 369 ff. on how this transforms our understanding of eros.

tion to engage with the human other who, like me, is already seen by God and addressed by God. Hence we can speak, as does Clement, of the “sacrament of the brother/sister.”⁵ To believe the Christian revelation is to be immersed (the word is deliberate) in this “circulation” of attention and invitation, always invited to the contemplation of the divine in the face of the revealer, Jesus, always invited to the recognition and service of the human other—and, as Clement does not fail to insist, the non-human other as well,⁶ since the renewed human subject is also liberated to see the world itself as loved by God and inviting humanity to discover how to live in reconciliation with its processes, neither absorbed in them nor struggling to defeat them.

I have begun with this summary of themes highlighted by Olivier Clement not because they are unique to him⁷—though often expressed with unique beauty and clarity—but because the way he sets them out helps us see how liturgical life and experience embody the new humanity—and how they throw light on the losses or errors of so much of the culture we are familiar with. The humanism to which Clement directs us is visible and effective as liturgy, specifically as Eucharistic liturgy; and if we are concerned to engage persuasively with a world threatened with an immense range of dehumanizing forces, we must be explicit about the connection between Christian anthropology and Christian liturgy. Clement, in the autobiography from which I have already quoted, describes his pre-Christian frustration in terms of being “hungry for the Eucharist,”⁸ hungry for a *practice* that would exhibit the new humanity he was gradually becoming aware of—a humanity characterized by royal authority, priestly mediation and prophetic showing of “the End already present.” The royal role appears in witness and work for peace and justice in history,

5. E.g. RE, pp. 203 ff.

6. OHB ch 7.

7. For example, Henri de Lubac writes that “Christianity is not one of the great things of history: it is history which is one of the great things of Christianity” (de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press 1987, p.145.

8. AS, p. 142.

the struggle against slaveries of all kinds. Priestliness is a matter of “the human being breathing in God, breathing the Spirit, and so making the universe and history breathe in God, sowing the seed of eternity in them: this prayer/breath, this power of “making Eucharist in all things,” untiringly in love with the knowledge and power in human beings that makes for the communion of persons and the transfiguration of the earth.” And the prophetic vision is not only of the End in our midst, but specifically the vision of all human flesh and every human face with the amazed attention that arises from the fact of God having become flesh and face.⁹ This is the humanity for which Clement yearns; this is the Eucharistic reality for which he is hungry; and, in case anyone should try to divide the sacramental from the contemplative, this is also the basis for understanding contemplative activity in the community as finding its proper rationale in what liturgy shows, and for seeing liturgy and theology alike as grounded in and oriented to contemplative attention—and the joy that arises in it.

2.

So how does our Eucharistic practice actually exhibit and realize all this? How does our anthropology become visible, tangible, in liturgy? One obvious place to begin is with the point about our humanity being engaged or addressed: the language of liturgy is essentially responsive. Liturgy fails in its purpose if it is repeatedly and obsessively talking to itself, i.e. explaining itself to a real or imagined audience; it is the speech of a community in answer to the proclaimed or recited Word and enacted presence of God, and so is primarily adoration, petition, thanksgiving. Its characteristic vehicle is the second person

9. *Ib.*, pp. 140-1.

singular—occasionally and for very specific functions the second person plural, to exhort and invite the assembly. When liturgy is overtaken by the latter, however, by exhortation, let alone interpretation of what it is doing, it is in real danger of becoming simply a reflection to the community of itself, its aspirations and concerns, or else a code of artificially organized signs; it has ceased to *show* anything more than itself. But when it is speaking in response to what it understands as an initiative from elsewhere, it may or may not persuade anyone that there *is* in fact an “elsewhere,” but at least it will not be mistaken for a mere exercise in corporate uplift, the polishing of a shared self-image. Words spoken to God acknowledging who God is, as in the Trisagion or the Sanctus or the Gloria, are also acknowledgements of who we as human speakers are—*recipients* of communication before we are speakers, and thus speakers who are always liable to be interrupted. This is a speech that is consistently hesitant even when it is extravagant in wording (like the Sanctus or Gloria), because it recognizes that what it says is a belated attempt to “trace” the act that has given it birth. Liturgical language shows something of the meaning of the word “grace” by its responsive and confessedly “secondary” character. The liturgical scholar Thomas Pott has written of liturgical theology that “it reflects and asks itself how the history of salvation, which consists of a dialectic between God’s action and the response of his people, is incarnated in the liturgy of the Church”; and he goes on to argue that this means an exploration of the “connections” that are made and/or witnessed in the liturgy, between God and humanity, between humanity as a whole and the liturgical action going forward—and, we might add, between human beings themselves and between humanity and the non-human environment.¹⁰ Language embodies connections, rela-

10. Thomas Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform. A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition*, Crestwood, N.Y., St Vladimir’s Press 2010, pp. 107-8.

tions; so to look critically at the language of liturgy is inevitably to look at how this language embodies and articulates connectedness with the action that is believed to generate it. And in this context, a theological liturgy will be one that challenges any human aspiration to “speak life into being” in purely immanent frameworks—whether this be in a mechanistic understanding of material process, a closed picture of the human future in terms of satisfying determinate wants, an anti-realist epistemology in which it is the speaking and fantasizing will that is the ultimate focus of our attention, or any other refusal of the possibility of interruption.

Liturgical humanity is a humanity both preceded and overtaken by the abundant—even “excessive”—communication of God. And this in turn means that the language and action of liturgy take *time*. Liturgy is not the same as ritual, the stylized performance of some function with a simple beginning and end. It is a period of time in which the transition from one world to another can be traced and enacted. The various forms in which this transition is symbolically acted out include in Orthodox liturgy the two “entrances” through the icon screen, as well as the emergence from the altar of the celebrant with the Holy Gifts; but Western traditions also have their ways of showing this, whether in the complex ceremonial of a High Mass or in the early Anglican practice (largely abandoned by the mid-17th century) of inviting the congregation to move into the chancel stalls at the invitation to confession, receiving Holy Communion there and then returning to the body of the church. The humanity embodied or enacted in the liturgy is a humanity acknowledging its need to *be moved*, to be drawn from one world to another; a humanity acknowledging that the

world it occupies habitually is “in question” and in need of opening on to another comprehensive frame of reference. In more theological terms—and picking up a theme close to the heart of Clement’s concerns¹¹—this ultimately entails recognizing the power and pervasiveness of *death* in the world we occupy and receiving from elsewhere the assurance and in some sense the experience of a world not limited by death. Liturgy, when it is doing its proper work, involves an ‘appropriation’ of death, a confession of mortality, so that the transition that is worked through in the liturgical act is genuinely a passage into life—from a world whose horizon is lifeless isolation to a world whose horizon is inexhaustible relational exchange. The time of the liturgy is thus the time of passage: we recognise that we are living ‘towards death’, in the Heideggerian phrase, that our unredeemed time is marked by the intensifying of self-enclosure, the growing risk of a final refusal of communion, and we expose ourselves to relation with a life that has already embraced death—has made death part of a narrative of continuing relation. As Clement says,¹² death and hell are closely associated in the traditional language of liturgy and theology: we are living in the direction of isolation, in that “fallen space, the space that separates and imprisons,” where I am both at odds with myself and unable to escape from myself. The liturgical affirmation is that there is another space to occupy, in which distance is not alienation, and time is an unfolding of constantly fresh perspectives on the endlessly fresh abundance of God’s act, because that act has always already put death behind it—not ignoring or trivializing it, but on the contrary passing through it in all its pain and gravity in the cross of Christ. As is often remarked, Eastern iconography depicts the resurrection of Christ by

11. E.g. An, pp. 111-12, RE, pp. 34-40, OHB ch 9

12. OHB, p. 144.

depicting the descent to the underworld, Christ raising up Adam and Eve and the saints of the First Covenant. This image is in a sense at the heart of “liturgical time”; this is the pivot on which the world turns, and the transition through which liturgical action takes us is a journey into a life which is constantly *receiving* life. We are obliged to face fully the reality and the consequences of our mortality, the way in which the isolation of death can come to overshadow our acts and relationships. But when the fear of death is acknowledged and overcome in the light of the resurrection, something else becomes possible, and this possibility is what is enacted in the climax of the liturgical action.

This climax is the making present of the events of Christ’s life and death, the release of the Holy Spirit that the resurrection enables and the sharing of transformed material stuff, food and drink. The food we share becomes the “language” we share, it is what carries the meaning we acknowledge together. The material world as represented by (summed up in) the sacramental elements is neither an enemy to be overcome nor a storehouse of resources to be exploited, but a vehicle of relation, with God and one another. Thus the new world into which liturgy inducts us is not a disembodied world of ideals: it is shaped by specific physical actions—the literal assemblage of a community of listeners and the sharing of material food understood as itself having been moved from one “world” to another. The humanity embodied in the liturgical action is constituted not only by an understanding and enactment of time, by a temporally extended passage from world to world, but by a renewed mode of relating to the material environment. Brought to God, placed in the hands of Christ, the elements of bread and wine are surrendered for transformation. Suffused by the Spirit

of the Risen Christ, they are identified with his life; as such they act as instruments to unite the assembly. They are not possessed or deployed by anyone: they simply become the matter of a shared action, regarded as themselves active, as having an inexhaustible interiority. And this particular transformation speaks of possibilities for the material world when released from our struggles to possess and master. In this respect, the humanism of the liturgy is a vision that gives us a kind of distance from the material stuff of the world sufficient for us to let go of our aspirations to control it or manipulate it. We are identified in the liturgy as material beings, part of a material complex of agency in the world, who must find their way and plot their action in this world conscious of the fact that matter can bear the life of God, in and out of strictly “sacramental” activity. We are pointed back to the “sacrament of the brother/sister” and the recognition of the depth that underlies the human face.

Built into all this is also the acknowledgement of the significance of *memory* in human identity. Liturgical humanity is humanity conscious of, “mindful” of, a context wider than that of the individual or even the community in this moment: to remember what has to be remembered in liturgy is to be aware that what is now happening for this particular group of people is inseparable from and unintelligible without, first, the events which generate liturgy in the first place, the historical events that make liturgical transition possible, and, second, the world of reference that in turn generates or animates those events. That is to say, liturgy is “mindful” of the eternal life of God the Word and of that human life in which it is embodied once for all. But as with the other characteristics of liturgically formed human existence,

this has implications that extend beyond the understanding of relation with God. We are led to see our humanity as always imbued with more than we can at this moment grasp or manage—and this involves both our past and our future: several Orthodox scholars have observed that the prayer immediately following the Words of Institution in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom “remembers” the cross, the burial, the resurrection, the ascension and the sitting on the father’s right hand and “the second and glorious *parousia*.” Remembrance extends to past, present and future; to the entire context in which the praying assembly stands, including the final consummation that is prayed for and is already present in the liturgical act. So with respect to all our human business: what we are is shaped by what has taken place and, in some sense, by what is hoped for and anticipated, the direction that is seen and imperfectly grasped. Our humanity lives intelligently to the degree that it acknowledges its rootedness, not simply in the past, significant though that is, but in the network of interwoven actions and processes that form present identity, including the reaching out of those actions and processes into an as-yet-unseen future. Liturgical humanity cannot compose and possess a final account of itself: it knows that what is immediate and accessible is partial and that it lives out of all kinds of “otherness”—a point which is, of course, another way of expressing what has been recognized in relation to humanity’s character as addressed and engaged from outside itself, as always cast in responsive mode.

Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox theologian sharing much in common with Olivier Clement, writes of the remembrance that takes place in the liturgy that it is simply our awareness of “the very *reality*

of the kingdom...because Christ manifested it and appointed it then, on that night, at that table.”¹³ The Kingdom of Heaven is a material and social world entirely transparent to Christ, one in which every situation is, precisely, an occasion of recalling or recognizing Christ, an occasion of remembering. And this focus on the coming of the kingdom illuminates another remark of Clement’s: “Attachment to a liturgical time understood in itself, above and beyond historical (and even cosmic) time is very typical of an attitude of sacralization closed upon itself.”¹⁴ Liturgical time and liturgical remembrance must not become something enjoyed as an escape into some parallel universe where the tensions of what I have called the “habitual world” are dissolved: rather, to quote Schmemmann again,¹⁵ it is a time in which each of the liturgical actions performed in this world is “transformed by the Holy Spirit into *that which it is*, a ‘real symbol’ of what it manifests.” Liturgical action is, we might say, “saturated” with the meaning God gives to the material process of the world. Thus we must say that, instead of providing a route out of the actual world into a sort of religious virtual reality, these actions uncover meanings that are always latent in the world we know. We as agents and speakers, the material we handle, see, sense and eat, the physical environment of the church, all of these have their depths exposed when the Spirit is invoked upon them. The point of liturgy is that we should “know the place for the first time,” as T.S.Eliot says of spiritual activity in the Four Quartets. We are returned to where we actually are in God’s eyes: in relation, in communion with God, with one another, with the creation.

13. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist; Sacrament of the Kingdom*, Crestwood, N.Y., St Vladimir’s Press 1987, p.200.

14 RE, p. 105.

15 Schmemmann, *op.cit.*, p.223.

3.

Much of what we have been considering is, of course, the general heritage of liturgical Christianity, not only of the Orthodox world; but I have chosen to set it out in these terms because it seems that Orthodox theology—despite the fact that Orthodoxy has a history of liturgical development and change like other communions¹⁶—sees more clearly how and why the action of the liturgical assembly *is* the defining reality for the Church, not in what it articulates in word or concept but in its character as *manifestation*; it is a theology which expects to find an anthropology in the liturgy, in a way that Western theologies have not on the whole sought to do (with some notable exceptions, including the writings of the Anglican Gregory Dix, with his notion of “Eucharistic man” as a reality opposed to the economic “man” or mass “man” (*sic*) of high modernity). To say this is not to propose a restrictive picture of Christian humanity as solely occupied in ritual activity—the caricature that all too readily comes to the Western mind. Rather, what we are looking at is how this activity specifies and incarnates a culture, which poses serious questions to aspects of our prevailing cultural scenes. Liturgy, especially though not exclusively the Eucharistic liturgy, claims that certain human possibilities have been definitively realized and that these are the deepest, most durable and most universal determinations of our humanity. We discuss with agonized intensity how Christian identity is to be embodied in the world in such a way as to make it clear that it does not depend upon a political or intellectual legitimacy gained from some other discourse; but we have not explored with anything like the imagination of a Clement or a Schmemmann how what we do in liturgical assembly constitutes a distinctive culture with a distinctive and critical anthropology.

16. See Thomas Pott, *op.cit.*

Some of this comes more clearly into focus if we try to spell out what a liturgical anthropology makes or should make impossible as defensibly, intelligibly human behavior. In the light of what we have been discussing, the fundamental and central affirmation of liturgy is that we are not self-created—that is, what is most important and defining about us is not our individual will and the agenda that flows from that. But this does not mean that human specificity, the uniqueness and liberty of the person, is extinguished either by a rival subjectivity in a relation of simple dominance, or by impersonal process. What and who we are is essentially defined by the gratuitous invitation from an unimaginable other into shared life—and to see the invitation of God in this way is at once to see that issues of dominance and thus of rivalry should not arise. This is not an other who competes with us; and to understand the nature of the personal liberty that so acts, through invitation and participation, is to understand radically different possibilities for our own understanding of liberty and the uniqueness of an active subject.

This is the first principle of what we might call a liturgical scepticism about certain human claims or fictions. Directly deriving from it is a scepticism about any approach to humanity that refuses or trivializes our location in time. This takes many forms: it is manifest in a popular culture that has limited understanding of the difference of the past from the present and a lack of concern with how ideas and ideals came to be out of dramatically different cultural situations. This is perhaps most painfully evident in a political rhetoric that treats the doctrines of liberal modernity as self-evident, oblivious to the theological debates (Christian and non-Christian) in which questions about rights and dignities first came into focus.¹⁷ But it is also to be seen in refusals to

17. For a fine corrective essay, see, for example, Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, London, Allen Lane 2014; and c.f. also Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political. Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy*, Notre Dame University Press 2012, especially chapter 3.

see ourselves as in any way constrained by the futures we may be creating, in individual and global actions alike: if we cannot understand that we are affecting—not to say corrupting—our humanity now by indifference about the planet’s future, as much as by self-centred individual behaviour, we shall be incapable of seeing how we might be defined by another sort of future, the kingdom, the reconciliation of humanity and environment. Conversely, if we do live from such a future, we should be incapable of the short-term search for gratification and comfort that has so damaged our physical habitat. Liturgical humanism teaches us a deep suspicion of any such quest.

In the same way, it challenges any attempt finally to evaluate, judge or rank any person (in or out of the Church) on the grounds of achievement and status, or even natural capacity. Liturgical humanism, with its commitment to seeing the face of the other uncovered in the light of Jesus, forms us in the practice of unconditional attention to any and every other: it does not preclude difficult decision, even confrontation, struggle for just relations, the naming of evil acts as such, but it requires all this to be set in the context of a recognition of worth that does not depend on a favourable verdict. The uncomfortable concerns of Christians about the unborn, the dying or the severely physically and mentally challenged have their roots here; and we might be more effective witnesses in these areas if we began by an insistent posing of the question, “How, on any other basis than this claim to unconditional attention, can we prevent our judgement of the worthwhileness of human lives becoming dependent on circumstances?” This would not be to deny situations of extremity or to despise and condemn judgements made in situations very far from ideal simplicity; but it

would affirm that the foundation of human respect lies in that liturgical conviction about the ‘status’ all share as recipients of a single gift and offer.

For a liturgical anthropology, there is no “end of history” in terms of the triumph of this or that human agenda: we have to say both that history has ended, once and for all, in the manifestation of the kingdom through Christ’s resurrection and the gift of the Spirit, and that history is an ineradicably real part of our human context, as a past that feeds and conditions us and as a future we must choose. Loose talk about the end of history will blind us both to the ways in which we are shaped by a past we cannot fully see and understand, and to the responsibility laid upon us to “choose life” here and now, whatever the apparent direction of global affairs. The breaking-in of God’s ‘end’ does not leave us with an indeterminate expanse of meaningless time to fill but gives form to our calling to act creatively, to work in and with our environment towards a future more transparent to God’s purpose, without any guarantees except that of God’s fidelity. The sacramental action gives flesh to a vision of what our humanity might be in a way that, without specifying a social or political programme, clarifies what is to be resisted—leaving us, quite properly, with a set of open questions as to the particular forms of common life, in family, community or state, that might best allow this humanity to develop and flourish. And it is important to ask those questions at every level: our choices are irreducibly to do with “public” life as well as “private,” and the liturgical skeptic ought to have her critical acumen sharpened for what is anti-human in the public as well as the private sphere. A politics which fails to secure the vulnerable—nationally or interna-

tionally—and treats categories of people as dispensable; or which is systematically indifferent to the degradation of the material world; or which drains the lifeblood from education, undermining its necessary diversity and appeal to the imagination; or which shores up spiraling inequalities in the levels of human well being and refuses critical engagement with a financial culture dangerously out of touch with social reality—any or all of these calls for a critique from the perspective of the humanism defined by Christian liturgy.

It is in this connection that Clement, in a powerful phrase, calls for Christians to be the “guarantors of the faith of others, of those also who do not themselves have faith but believe, often with real humility, in beauty and goodness.” They should be “*guardians of an open humanity in an open society.*”¹⁸ It should be clear that this is not a commendation of some vacuous or value-free pluralism; the openness in question is the possibility of openness to the horizon of resurrection life. The believer is one who takes seriously all that keeps alive that kind of openness, in art, science or politics, someone who is committed to keeping alive a serious debate about the nature of the human at a time when trivial, functionalist, and mechanical anthropologies are so often taken for granted. But the particular point of approaching all this by way of liturgical practice is that the Church does not proclaim a set of ideas about human being, it physically enacts the new world in a drama that is also a quite straightforward and literal event of gathering and feeding. And celebrating the liturgy is the primary way in which we are constituted guardians and guarantors, in Clement’s words, of the faith of others; we show that the often obscure hope or confidence in human dignity that animates people outside the community of faith in Christ is not without foundation. Here, in this particular space and

18. Clement, An, p.58. (italics in original).

time, it is enacted, not simply as a humanly devised sign of what is hoped for but as a “charismatic” event in which, so we believe, what is symbolized is itself present and effective.

“In every era, the divine liturgy can be the place and the mode by which the human being leaves behind the blind captivity of his or her normal conditions of life; the place and the mode in which he or she finds their prayers heard and receives strength for the realization of their hopes and desires. And if this emerges from reality not from a theoretical principle, why should our own age be deprived of a similar occasion for salvation?”¹⁹ These words from a contemporary Greek bishop aptly sum up the offer and potential of a “liturgical humanism” that defines something of how Christians configure their intervention in modern culture and politics. The perennial temptation of the North Atlantic mind is to believe that a mixture of gestures and programs will solve long-term ailments; the perspective we have been exploring begins elsewhere, with the invitation to a communal event in which an alternative human reality is mapped out—and which, participants believe, actually enables that alternative to be a present reality, making a difference to them. A call to re-engage with contemporary culture on the basis of the liturgy is likely to sound precious and unrealistic if what people understand by liturgy is the enclosed world of ritual code criticized by Clement and Schmemmann:²⁰ and we should not give house-room to any suggestion that this is some sort of safer alternative to other kinds of engagement, social and intellectual. But if what we most want and need to proclaim and to share with our world is the fleshly reality of the new community, the possibility of a transition into the new world which connects us with the depths of the familiar world, we need to keep liturgical action at the centre of our vision.

19. John of Thermopylae, “La divina liturgia: risposto all’inquietudine dell’uomo contemporaneo,” in H. Legrand, Ch. Savvatos et al., Nicola cabasilas e la divina liturgia, Bose, Edizioni Qiqajon, pp. 283-297, p. 287.

20. E.g. Schmemmann, op.cit., pp. 44-7.

As the Orthodox tradition represented by Clement and others insists, the question that we should be asking ourselves about liturgy in our churches is not whether it is instructive, even instantly intelligible, let alone entertaining, but whether it looks as though it is grounded in listening to the Word and event that has interrupted human solipsism; whether it looks as though it is credibly changing the vision and the policies of those participating, so that they are awakened to the active realities of person, liberty, communion and—ultimately—resurrection. The deepest problem with liturgical practice is a failure to make resurrection visible—and, in the context of our discussion here, this also means a failure to take death seriously, to be stuck in the banal present of the rootless, aimlessly desiring individual will. Jacques Maritain published many years ago a well-known book on *Integral Humanism*, seeking to show how Christian theology offered a more diversified and truthful account of human capacity than any secular ideology; the task of showing this to our culture remains—and perhaps what we most need at present is a clear locating of this in the liturgical context. If the gospel is more than another ideology, another theory, this is where we must begin, conscious of the fact that the Christian “interruption” does not offer solutions to discrete problems, or positive experiences to offset doubt and suffering. Clement quotes²¹ a Russian Christian interviewed for a television program during the Soviet era who, asked if Christianity made her happy, replied “You’re not a Christian so that you can be happy, you’re not in the Church to be happy but to be alive.” What is the liturgical embodiment of that recognition? If we can answer *that*, we shall have learned where to find integral humanism.

21. An, p. 63.