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Liturgy and Imagination

This article is based on the Fifth Annual Michael Vasey Memorial Lecture, given at St John's College, Durham, on 29th October 2003. It takes up some of the preoccupations of current discussions of liturgical formation, and proposes that these should be extended beyond competence in recognition and technical arrangement of forms, to take account of imagination and memory. Liturgical formation in this guise would not demand the teaching of more skills; instead, it would seek to reopen the access to skills which are already latent in the tradition of worship. Such a process would enlist faculties customarily associated with Prayer Book practice and apply them to contemporary texts and structures. Its aim would be to refashion the whole being of the worshipper rather than simply to teach greater agility in manipulating a wide range of resources. In other words, it would claim the heart as well as the mind in worship.

Introduction

Liturgical formation has been a current topic at least since the formal beginning of the Liturgical Movement in the early twentieth century. The programme of education developed to ease the introduction of the recent Common Worship materials has reanimated discussions of formation in Church of England worship[1], and has created a subsidiary literature of manuals, guide books and teaching packs. Meanwhile, the Liturgical Commission has set itself the task of extending the project of liturgical formation as the principal part of the next phase of its work. This is potentially an important opportunity to move beyond training in a kind of technical competence in manipulating the new provisions, and to seek ways of taking hold of the imaginations of worshippers. This article proposes that, rather than requiring new skills, the means of engaging the liturgical imagination may lie in the habits and practices that are already available in our tradition of worship. First of all, however, it is necessary to make a detour into fiction, to a place where a statement of what I am trying to articulate unexpectedly appears.

The setting is the village of Middlemarch in George Eliot's novel of the same name, and the year is about 1832. It is a complex work, full of frustrated ambition, disappointment, submerged anger, and powerful knowledge. One of the

1 The subject of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation Conference at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, August 2003 It is also treated in Christopher Irvine's forthcoming book, *The Art of God: the formation of Christians in the likeness of Christ*, SPCK, London 2005.

disappointments occurs when a property which seems certain to be left to a charming but rather feckless young man by a distant relation turns out to have been left to a boorish outsider. There is much general indignation, but also a secret fear. The outsider reveals a past connection to the local bank manager, and knows that the source of his wealth sits uneasily with his exemplary Evangelical piety.

The unwelcome heir prepares to blackmail the bank manager, but falls ill soon after returning to the village to exploit their shared history. He is taken to the house he has just inherited, where the bank manager himself supervises his care and summons the local doctor. The doctor, having married the extremely pretty daughter of a local family, is living beyond his means in an effort to keep up his wife's expectations, and is known to be sinking into debt. He has already applied to the bank manager for a loan, and been refused. This imposes considerable strain on his attendance on the patient. But suddenly the atmosphere changes, and he finds himself being offered a loan on very favourable terms.

He leaves the house, relieved about his finances, and having instructed the bank manager and his housekeeper to administer opium, but to refuse the sick man's demands for brandy. For the pair at the bedside, this initiates a battle of conscience. Should the doctor's orders be obeyed, in which case the blackmailer will recover, or should the bank manager solve his own problems by making brandy available? His last action before leaving the house is to give the housekeeper the keys to the wine cooler. The death for which he has been hoping follows shortly afterwards.

But the village is not satisfied with the circumstances of the death. Particular notice is taken of the coincidence of the doctor's ability to settle his debts with the local tradespeople and his efforts with the banker's patient. Mrs Dollop, the landlady of a local public house, comments that the butcher's bill, which has been unpaid for over a year, has just been cleared. She sums up with the menacing words, '*I* don't want anybody to come and tell *me* as there's been more going on nor the Prayer-book's got a service for.'[2]

This wonderfully graphic phrase demands to be read over and over. What better way of conveying the disruption of the godly order of small town life in England by events outside of the common pool of local knowledge? Yet had the observant Mrs Dollop been speaking literally rather than figuratively, she – or her creator – would have had to be hailed as a prophetic voice in liturgical studies. Her words capture the aspiration to a form of common prayer that regulates every department of life, but recognise simultaneously that some things escape even the most capacious provision for public worship. They look to the stability within the celebration of the ordinary life-cycle events of birth, marriage and death; the regular invitation to worshippers to say their prayers every day and to receive communion; the baptism and confirmation of those entering the Church's life. At the same time, they hint at much that cannot be encompassed within the 'one use' set down at the Reformation.

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2 George Eliot, *Middlemarch* [First published 1871-1872], Wordsworth Editions,Ware, Herts 1994, Book VIII, chapter 71, p 676.

More than the Prayer Book?

It is probably true to say that every generation has, in one way or another, grappled with the problem of the 'more' that the Prayer Book has not covered. Revising services, compiling new services, turning to the service books of other denominations, and abandoning formal structures altogether are not twentieth-century novelties. Even as the First Prayer Book of Edward VI was put into use, moves were afoot to revise it. This is why Colin Buchanan's slim booklet, *What Did Cranmer Think He Was Doing?*[3], remains one of the most exciting books about liturgy. It goes beyond the reordering of words and shapes to produce an entirely – and almost dangerously – persuasive reimagining of the conditions of worship in which the 1549 Order of Holy Communion became the 1552 version.

In living memory, the results of efforts to define what it is that existing materials do not provide, and then to make good the lack, have been increasingly before the eyes of most denominations – indeed, some members of the Church of England might wonder whether there *could* be anything more going on than Common Worship has a service for. Many observers of the recent revision process might feel vindicated by the Roman Catholic liturgist, Christopher Walsh, who has commented that 'the origin and genesis of liturgical texts is more of a mystery to most church members than the hypostatic union or uncreated grace'.[4] What I want to argue (and as Walsh demonstrates in the article that follows this opening flourish), is that new composition is not self-indulgence and an unlimited writing opportunity for those in a position to influence public worship.

For pastoral liturgists, the provision of new material is a matter of deep significance, going much further than composition on a large scale. New materials have come forward to meet perceived needs – differences in literacy, varying settings for worship, churchmanship, the involvement of children in worship, and the increasingly multicultural nature of church life, especially in urban areas. It is, in one sense, a means to the end of making the Church's rites, as far as possible, welcoming and intelligible to both faithful and hesitant believers, while keeping worship broadly liturgical. In another sense, it is concerned with maintaining the continuity of a tradition. In yet another sense, it seeks to detect and express the many voices who seek to be represented, and to recognise themselves, in common prayer.

That is not all, but it is easier to talk about texts and their history, than it is to speak of other elements which resist inscription. We are now more and more familiar with shapes, patterns and deep structures; we can distinguish between eucharistic prayers and talk about the symbolic progression of the baptism rite. Electronic resources make it possible for services to be tailor-made for particular groups and occasions, and by people who do not have the professional credentials of the clergy. This development alone ought to engage the liturgical imagination. In a sense it has, although one might hesitate briefly over the rather mechanical nature of the process. Imagination ought, surely, to exceed this undeniably useful set of objective, analytical, identifying, and compiling skills.

3 Colin Buchanan, *What Did Cranmer Think He Was Doing?*, Grove Books, Bramcote, Notts 1976, repr. 1982.

4 Christopher J. Walsh, 'Minding Our Language', *Worship* 74 (6) 2000, pp 482-503, p 482.

Again, it is easier to discuss structures, or the sorts of typical congregations who might respond to alternative configurations, than to frame the living dynamic between the shape and language of worship and those who participate which is inevitably more than a service book can confine. The American Benedictine, Aidan Kavanagh, has suggested that 'ritual studies in general may be seen as a stethoscope placed on the heart of a human society, and liturgics as a stethoscope placed on the heart of a church'[5]. What the teachable techniques of structural recognition in liturgy do not tell us, is how worship engages the heart, how we find the pulse that confirms a living encounter.

This is a curious blind spot in so much material published to promote a popular understanding of worship, particularly since the 'cognitive-affective' nature of religion as an activity is widely discussed.[6] By contrast, Michael Vasey was acutely aware of the need to take account of every faculty in leading people towards a profounder sense of what they were doing in church. Michael was also a master of irony, as he demonstrated when a Durham clergyman and I arrived, shyly but proudly, at the door of his study to discuss a scheme for improving the liturgical education of the parish. He nodded sagely and encouragingly as we explained the idea. Then he pressed a button, and from his printer appeared a far more elegant, thoughtful and imaginative scheme, which he modestly offered for our consideration. It led worshippers to ask how they had arrived at their present practice of worship. It also made unconventionally practical suggestions, like having baptisms on the day of the parish fête and surrounding sacramental celebration with as much vernacular joy as local life could muster.

Nothing further was heard of our course. The effect of this interview, on the other hand, was more enduring, because it had raised questions about the communication of tradition, the structure of familiar rites, and the nature of the worshipping community which went well beyond the historical and doctrinal emphases that dominate much liturgical education. We did not know then that we were being introduced to the idea of 'liturgical formation'. What we did realise, was that there was a great deal more involved in making worship something that worshippers discussed with excitement than we had hitherto imagined.

The fatal flaw in the stillborn parish education programme was its failure to grasp the insight which Michael Vasey had already put into deceptively simple words: that '[i]ndividual Christians need to build up a spiritually constructive understanding of the Church's liturgical forms'. Characteristically, he followed this immediately with a list of potential difficulties:

> In the past this depended mainly on unofficial pastoral processes within different traditions in the Church. In much contemporary evangelism there is

5 Aidan Kavanagh OSB, *On Liturgical Theology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 1984, p 149.

6 See, for example, Jeff Astley, 'The Role of Worship in Christian Learning' in Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis & Colin Crowder, eds, *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation*, Gracewing, Leominster & Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1996, pp 245-251, p 250.

> no mechanism or context in which such liturgical formation of the individual can take place. The result can be a profound alienation. The absence of appropriate methods of such liturgical formation can lead sensitive ministers to abandon patterns of worship that would be profoundly enriching if their inner genius could be communicated. Often liturgical formation is limited to theological colleges, encouraging the notion that liturgy is a clerical preserve.

After this discouraging picture, though, he did offer the brief but optimistic observation that one of the great strengths of catechumenal approaches to evangelism is that they can enable people to relate helpfully to valuable liturgical forms.[7] Suppose we were to take up this implied directive from a different starting point, testing the idea that valuable forms can be learned from the inside as well as from the outside. Suppose we were to begin with words rather than with structures and patterns, and with the most primitive way of learning a liturgical shape.

Learning by heart

Take, for example, a parish which regularly uses two of the eight authorised Common Worship Eucharistic Prayers, perhaps Prayers A and B. After a while, some worshippers will discover that the words are almost completely committed to memory. This changes the experience of being at the Eucharist a great deal. Memory affects the way you listen to a prayer, since if you know what is coming next, you can relax, not strain forward, sometimes even think backwards so that the whole becomes assembled in your mind. At other times, it introduces an element of waiting, shading into impatience, when 'Accept our praises, heavenly Father, through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ' is not followed quickly enough by 'and as we follow his example and obey his command. . .' (Prayer A). But eventually, a pattern of anaphoric repetition begins to emerge: '*through* him you have created all things from the beginning and formed us in your own image'; '*Through* him you have freed us from the slavery of sin'; *Through* him you have sent upon us your holy and life-giving Spirit'. Similarly, '*Accept* our praises, heavenly Father through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ' is followed after the words of institution by '*Accept* through him our great high priest this our sacrifice of thanks and praise'.

Such gradual and unconscious acquisition leads one to reflect on the process of memorising and internalising, until single words become whole sequences. It also makes one wonder whether the vigorous constituency which responds involuntarily to such Prayer Book prompts as 'who has knit together thine elect' (Collect for All Saints' Day) or 'Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness' (Collect for the First Sunday in Advent) or 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord' (Third Collect at Evensong) has more in common with users of modern language rites than either group might imagine possible. Texts like these are resonant and evocative in their own right, of course, and it is significant that, while

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7 Michael Vasey, 'Promoting a Common Core', in Michael Perham, ed., *The Renewal of Common Prayer: Unity and Diversity in Church of England Worship*, Church House Publishing/ SPCK, London 1993, pp 81-101, p 90.

few people have a very solid recall of Alternative Service Book or Common Worship texts, those which are remembered are quite predictable. It would be safe to place bets – what was the Third Eucharistic Prayer in the ASB and is now Eucharistic Prayer B will be remembered for its vivid image of salvation: 'he opened wide his arms for us on the cross. He put an end to death, and revealed the resurrection to new life.' Others will name the alternative post communion prayer, 'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when you were still far off, you met us in your Son and brought us home'.

These well-loved words are also part of the liturgical shaping of time, and are associated with particular points in the Eucharist, or in the Evening Office, or in the Church's Year. Their regular repetition, as much as their literary qualities, makes them part of the fabric of memory, capable of being triggered by one or two key words. It is reassuring to recall that such responses are not peculiar to users of the Prayer Book, but characteristic rather of a habit of praying. This is beautifully illustrated in William Langland's great fourteenth-century poem recording the vision of Piers the Plowman, whose whole dream of salvation is an intricately worked tissue of prayer and Scripture. He wakes out of his vision at the beginning of Holy Week, on the morning of Palm Sunday. The time can be exactly established, because he refers to the day by the opening line of its antiphon – *in ramis palmarum*[8] – and Langland was able to assume that his readers' own habit of regular churchgoing would make this immediately obvious.

Sameness, repetition, stability: surely it is paradoxical, in a climate where there are so many resources to explore, to suggest that they are virtues in the Church's worship. Yet what they amount to, is an implicit methodology that instils rather than teaches. Jeff Astley has written of a comparable process in a consideration of 'Christian education' and how it should be defined. He understands it as

> *education into Christianity*. On this definition the phrase marks out those *educational processes through which people learn to become Christian and to be more Christian*. Christian education, so defined, results in Christian learning, in the sense of the adoption and deepening of Christian beliefs, attitudes and values, and of a person's disposition to act and experience in Christian ways, in addition to changes in other dimensions of the learner's mind, heart and will. So the focus is on Christianity, not general education; but the aim is 'to learn Christianity; and not just to learn about it. Much of it may indeed be described as 'learning Christ' (cf. Ephesians 4:20)[9] .

It is a methodology which does its mapping from the inside, and writes on the heart. And it leads one to wish to challenge one fierce defender of Prayer Book worship who claims that the Authorised Version and the book of Common Prayer

> constitute the most precious elements in our collective selfhood and our sense of continuity. They present an interior landscape of powerful images and

8 William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman*, B Text, ed. W.W. Skeat, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1869, 5th repr. 1964, Passus XVIII, pp 322-323.

9 Jeff Astley, 'Aims and Approaches in Christian Education', in Jeff Astley, ed., *Learning in the Way*, Gracewing, Leominster 2000, pp 1-32, p 2.

> invocations, whereas the liturgical commissioners' products are designed as so much stage machinery, sham antiques set up in temporary, shiftable, one-dimensional cardboard. Stage machinery is useful but it should never replace real landscape experienced in historic depth.[10]

It is far from impossible that modern language liturgy should participate in the interior landscaping celebrated here, but it will not happen in the absence of the same patterns of repetition that formed people in a Prayer Book shape and stocked their memories with Prayer Book words. Yet how are we to approach patterns of repetition in the context of a major shift from 'text' to 'resource' in the understanding of liturgical provision?

A significant challenge will be to extend the process beyond familiar texts which, used often enough, can be written on hearts. There is scope for attention to the cyclical and seasonal texts with perhaps one luminous image that might govern a journey of many weeks and encourage a particular kind of meditation. The Advent Blessing, 'Christ the Sun of Righteouness shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path'; the Epiphany Blessing, 'Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory'; the Easter Blessing, which adopts almost verbatim a text from Hebrews, 'The God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep', are a few of many more examples.

A very different challenge comes from the wealth of materials not intended for regular use, and sometimes not even intended for common prayer. Here we might look to the prayers intended for use with the dying and those who are bereaved and mourning, in conjunction with the recent provisions for funerals.

These prayers take a different imaginative strategy that has no designs on inscribing words on the heart, but seeks instead to offer words that might have come straight from the heart. Listen to this prayer, suggested for use with those who mourn:

> Father, you know our hearts and share our sorrows. We are hurt by our parting from *N* whom we loved: when we are angry at the loss we have sustained, when we long for words of comfort, yet find them hard to hear, turn our grief to truer living, our affliction to firmer hope in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.[11]

This is a style of prayer which has many of the characteristics of *ex tempore* prayer, and of the personal ministry to individuals, yet enters into the public currency via publication, giving the illusion of common experience. There is a simple rawness in the personal voice here which no one would expect to hear in the solemn, controlled and entirely proper language of the BCP – except that it comes through faintly in the 1549 burial service's prayer of commendation, addressed directly to the person who has died.[12] The prayer we have just heard would no doubt attract criticism in public worship, but in its context, it voices the

10 David Martin, 'Alternative Visions and Constraints: Religious Education' [1981], in *Christian Language and its Secular Mutations*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2002, pp 135-144, p 143.

11 Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Common Worship Pastoral Services*, Church House Publishing, London 2000, p 355.

12 'I commende thy soule to God the father almyghtie, and thy bodye to the grounde, earth to earth, asshes to asshes, dust to dust, in sure and certayne hope of resurreccion to eternall lyfe . . .' F.E. Brightman, *The English Rite*, vol. II, Rivingtons, London 1915, p 858.

unprocessed grief of the recently bereaved. It could not have been included among the approved services and prayers of a Church in an era which did not readily accept the personal voice, the right to freedom of expression, the psychological process of grieving, and the necessity of speaking in the language of pain and bewilderment.

It is also a useful reminder of the impact of ordinary words.[13] If we are uncomfortable, is it because the words are not beautiful enough, not sufficiently crafted to mask the anger and loss, which they acknowledge without any filtering and refinement? Sometimes it takes that degree of a forceful plainness to drive the meaning home. Here is Hamlet, who speaks lyrically to the uncomprehending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of a quality of mental freedom that he does not feel in the oppressive atmosphere of the Danish court, and then abruptly changes register to make his distress unmistakable:

> O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.[14]

Growing up liturgically

The length and slightly random character of these examples is only excused by the elusiveness of the elements in worship which they have tried to pin down. It is time to draw some of the threads together.

Talking about the practice of liturgy makes it hard to stand back and take a more objective view, to suggest how my experience may be not simply personal and idiosyncratic, but shared by other people. In the course of this reflection on the way we learn by heart, and the way new liturgical writing strives consciously to allow hearts to speak, it has seemed that part of the difficulty comes from the fact that these are transitional times for liturgical language, style and structure. There are critical decisions to be made about the use of ordinary language and simple words, just as there are considerations governing more elaborate composition. We are in the interestingly provisional stage of not yet having criteria, agreements, standards of excellence, models of the best available where a traditional style of writing is no longer used.

We have been made alert to variety through the range of choice and the enormous number of sources for modern rites. But we are still in the process of learning to listen, and to pick up the cadences of a very different liturgical idiom which is sometimes at its strongest where it is least reminiscent of the BCP. At the same time, we remain quick to criticise. It is so easy to be distracted by worrying infelicities, and such undignified pictures as Jesus 'having supper with his friends'. Solemnity is something we understand, while the irreverently casual is uncharted territory.

It is at these times that the securities of the Prayer Book, its standards of composition and its unity of style, are particularly appealing. The mistake is to

13 Christopher Walsh writes of the resistance of Vatican assessors to the use of ordinary words in ICEL texts. Thus 'cup' rather than 'chalice' for *calix*, or 'table' rather than 'altar' for *mensa* are not accepted. 'Minding Our Language', p 500.

14 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, scene ii, lines 256-258, in Stanley Wells & Gary Taylor, eds, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Complete Works*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, p 666.

think that we have lost these landmarks altogether. They are very much with us, and the responsibility is to make sure that what has constructed our Anglicanism, enshrined its doctrine, and shaped its spirituality, continues to have a vital place. This will be hard to defend if the Prayer Book is treated as a precious relic, the guardian of our linguistic and aesthetic heritage, a once and for all document. It is important to remember that, from the first moment of the Prayer Book's appearance, there were vigorous pockets of resistance, and that in every generation there have been those who did not think it adequate or appropriate and proposed changes.

The well-worn oppositions that variously see Prayer Book language as matchless, and Common Worship language as pedestrian; or the Prayer Book as all-encompassing, and Common Worship as a mere proliferation of paper; or the Prayer Book as out of date and tedious, and Common Worship as vibrant and exciting, have become increasingly unreal and profoundly unhelpful. We need to grow up, to learn a method of response to the way that we worship which might have been learned from consciously remembering why we love the Prayer Book, but which also accepts without mourning or nostalgia that a Prayer Book memory is no longer the possession of all Anglicans.

After all, would any contemporary compiler be flattered by the kind of praise which C.S. Lewis accorded the BCP?

> There are of course many good, and different, ways both of writing prose and of praying. [The Prayer Book's] temper may seem cold to those reared in other traditions but no one will deny that it is strong. It offers little and concedes little to merely natural feelings: even religious feelings it will not heighten till it has first sobered them; but at its greatest it shines with a white light hardly surpassed outside the pages of the New Testament itself.[15]

What we have learned from the style of some Common Worship writing, especially in the Pastoral Rites, is that elegant language is not always the best means of communication; that knowing our necessities before we ask makes it too easy for us to gloss over our ignorance in asking – our confusion, blankness, pain, fear. The lesson that admirers of the Prayer Book have to teach, and perhaps to learn, is the habit of love for the language and rhythm of modern language liturgy; the necessity of pausing to wonder why we love particular words and shapes and habits of worship.

A little earlier, the alternative post communion prayer, 'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off, you met us in your Son and brought us home', was mentioned, and it is useful to return to it now as a demonstration of another way of listening and responding. Several years ago, I attempted a short paper full of exalted thoughts on this prayer, composed for the Alternative Service Book by David Frost. Its serious content was punctured by a

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15 C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1954, repr. 1973, p 221.

question from a well known liturgist, who asked how people might feel about a slight adjustment: 'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off, you met us in your *car* and brought us home'. A proposition like this could have done permanent damage to the audience's future experience of saying this prayer by robbing it of all *gravitas* and engineering a comic encounter between modern technology and biblical allusion. In a contemporary setting, the father of the Prodigal Son may well have met him in his car and brought him home to a barbecue. But the prayer has anticipated this disruption by its own much more dramatic disruption, in which the incarnate and crucified Christ stands between God and fallen humanity, making us acceptable and recognisable to the Father whose inheritance we have squandered. Again, the gentle ambiguity of a single preposition – 'you met us *in* your Son' – creates slight uncertainty as to how the Son relates to all the other parties. He identifies with his Father as he identifies with human beings, and with astonishing economy, the prayer opens up a scene in which God comes to meet us; meets us in God; meets God in us. It is strong enough to survive frivolity, as well as to remind us of the extreme seriousness of play. Taking our liturgical language seriously enough to play with it may in itself be a sign of growing up.

Conclusion : liturgical formation

There are two imperatives which seem to be at work in pursuing the idea that there is more going on than the Prayer Book, or any prescribed form of public worship, has a service for. Firstly, there is an urgency about knowing what the Church can offer, both out of its tradition and out of its ordinary life. This is not a didactic and factual form of knowledge, but what Michael Vasey might have called a 'spiritually constructive' knowledge, and what Jeff Astley has characterised as the 'hidden curriculum' in Christian worship.[16] Secondly, there is a need to attend to the inward shaping of the individuals who begin to move about freely in a tradition and a form of practice.

In one of several collections of essays that looked towards the liturgical scene in the twenty-first century, Donald Gray saw the need for 'imaginative liturgies' that would 'be capable of stimulating interest and provoking questions, while not necessarily answering them.' 'We must always beware,' he warned, 'of liturgy becoming educative. We do not need to create congregations which leave church asking, "What have I learnt today?"'[17] This might be misread as a total dismissal of any claim to learning through the medium of worship, and it is helpfully clarified and expanded by Jeff Astley, who writes:

> Worship is not *for* anything; it has no ulterior point or purpose, least of all an educational one. Religious people do not worship in order to do or become anything else, to teach or to learn. Worship is an end in itself.
>
> As such, it has close affinities with play, indeed it has been claimed that 'worship can be seen as the explicitly religious form of play'. For play is a

16 Jeff Astley, 'Christian Worship and the Hidden Curriculum of Christian Learning', in Jeff Astley & David Day, eds, The *Contours of Christian Education*, McCrimmons, Great Wakering, Essex 1992, pp 141-152.

17 Donald Gray, 'Eucharistic Inflation', in Michael Perham, ed., *Liturgy for a New Century*, SPCK/Alcuin Club, London 1991, pp 21-28, pp 26-27.

> non goal-directed activity. As children we need to play in order to mature and to learn, but we do not enter into play with either intention.[18]

At its best, worship provides a spacious playground for the imaginations of those who participate. Imaginative worship is the sort that best defines this space. It is not the business of equipping a few professionals with more resources so that they can do more *to* the congregations they serve. For that reason, it is essential that anyone responsible for formation at the moment should be actively seeking a great deal more than a grasp of structures and forms. That is only the beginning of a correspondence between the spaciousness of the liturgy; the shaping of rites and prayers; and the shaping and refashioning of the hearts and minds of those who join in common prayer.

I have not yet found a description of this process in any liturgical handbooks. A definition of sorts comes instead from the Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser. In the sonnet sequence he dedicated to the woman he eventually married, he describes the internally transforming and absolutely liberating effect that love has produced in him:

> You frame my thoughts and fashion me within,
> you stop my toung, and teach my hart to speake[19]

It is that making and remaking of the space within by grasping both reason and affection that that the most imaginative liturgy achieves. That is the kind of liturgy that is capable of forming the people of God.

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18 Astley, 'The role of worship in Christian learning', p 245.

19 Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti*, Sonnet VIII, in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, Ware, Hertfordshire 1995, p 563.

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