religions

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"Fruit of the Earth", "Fruit of the Vine", "Work of Human Hands": A *Logiké Latreía* towards a Transformative Response to the Ecological Crisis? Liturgical and Pastoral Implications

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore how liturgical celebration can serve as a transformative response to the contemporary ecological crisis and its consequences. This is inextricably bound to the importance of addressing the pastoral needs of individuals who are hurting due to their interactions or lack thereof with the cosmos and the erosion of their relationship with nature in a technocratic consumerist society. Ritual, as a vehicle for personal and communal transformation, takes on heightened significance in a world wounded by ecological devastation. Rituals, often deeply embedded in cultural, religious, or personal practices, indeed have the capacity to facilitate personal transformation. They provide a framework for individuals to navigate life transitions, foster a sense of belonging, and connect with the overarching narrative. However, in an ecologically wounded world, where environmental degradation, climate change, and biodiversity loss are pressing concerns, the ramifications of ritual take on added significance and complexity. This paper seeks to address the urgency of the need to respond to this multifaceted crisis by paying attention to the pastoral needs of the individual and the community at large by redressing the real meaning of worship and reflecting on how, within a Christian tradition, this reconfiguration of worship can be provocative enough to instil change. However, this endeavour is not without inherent challenges and enduring questions. The pervasive influence of a technocratic worldview poses a significant threat not only to our relationship with the earth but also to the very essence of ritual itself. Can the liturgical experience, reaching its climax in the Eucharistic celebration, be truly a catalyst in asserting a proper relationship of humanity on various levels, which are concentric and, thus, dependant on each other, with humanity itself, with the cosmos, and with God?

Keywords: ecological crisis; eco-literacy; worship; liturgy; pastoral care; lament; Eucharist

Citation: Buttigieg, Dorianne. 2024. "Fruit of the Earth", "Fruit of the Vine", "Work of Human Hands": A *Logiké Latreía* towards a Transformative Response to the Ecological Crisis? Liturgical and Pastoral Implications. *Religions* 15: 913. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080913

Academic Editor: Albin Masarik

Received: 3 June 2024
Revised: 2 July 2024
Accepted: 24 July 2024
Published: 27 July 2024

1. Introduction: An Unlikely Relationship or a Cliché?

"The church's liturgy is always primal–of, belonging to, and from the earth that God created and saw that it was 'good'", writes Kevin Irwin (Irwin 2023, p. xi). This dispels any thoughts that the relationship between liturgy and ecology might appear a contrived endeavour, since "human beings cannot exist except within an ecological/environmental setting (Johnson 2012, p. 31)". It is, therefore, undeniable that the relationship between humanity and that of worship itself is an em-bodied one. The transcendental realm cannot exist without the entry of the bodily and worldly which the faithful and the worshipper brings from the worldly. Therefore, "as embodied beings, located in particular times and places, humans bring everything that we are, shaped in accord with our ecological located-ness, to engage in our works of worship, to celebrate our liturgies (ibid., p. 32)".

Herein lies the relevance of looking at the origin of the English word "worship" as lying in the notion of ascribing worth to God and to all aspects of experience: "The basic act of worship extends out toward the horizon of the creation, to things seen and unseen, to ascribe worth in God (Stewart 2012, p. 1)". Likewise, ecology radiates forward, extending

"to the horizons of the universe (ibid.)". It explores the process of interdependence of everything that inhabits the planet, including humankind. The reality of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore this interdependence and its fragility once this is compromised or disrupted.

The process of worship itself extends to the created order, in order to immerse humanity into an experience of God which encompasses a totality. Antithetically, worship uprooted from its connectedness to the earth yields no meaning; it leads to a perfunctory and alienating worship experience. The impact of "rugged individualism", coupled with an aggressive degradation of the environment as a consequence of utilitarianism, has served to alienate humanity from itself and from the rest of the cosmos.[1]

David Cann points to three main factors associated with utilitarianism, which is unleashing destructive forces on the natural world and also human societies. The first of these is the attitude permeating contemporary societies wherein people must compete against others for the limited resources on the planet.

Second, there are pervasive individualism and materialism which equip people with the attitude of exploitation vis-à-vis other people and the natural world. Third, as a result of this pursuit of rampage, there is no immediate concern for the damage inflicted upon other people and the natural world itself (Cann 2021a, p. 149). The reality of a scarcity mindset which permeates contemporary thought, for example, would focus only on the immediate and individualistic, with little focus on anything else.

This is one reason why the worship experience has been reduced to mere ritualism with little bearing on the individual's life. One other reason is the dearth of experience and formation as to what constitutes a proper worship experience: the experience of encounter. As Cann affirms unequivocally,

> In the face of an environmental crisis, brought about largely through the effect of the utilitarian culture driving modern human activity, and an identity struggle, resulting from scientific discoveries that challenge human world views, an urgent need has arisen to rediscover what it means to be a person and what is the meaning of the living environment. (Cann 2021a, p. 151)

Equally, we are not cognisant of where we are, where we stand vis-à-vis the world around us. We might at times be shocked out of numbness by a number of environmental tragedies of catastrophic proportions, such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on 26 April 1986 (dramatised in the HBO series bearing the same name in order to serve as a perpetual reminder), the Exxon Valdez oil spillage on 24 March 1989 off the Alaskan coast, or the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, on 11 March 2011, in the wake of a massive earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan.

All this begs the question "How aware are we of where we really are?" Steven Bouma-Prediger asks a battery of questions about the awareness of our connectedness to the world in even the most mundane underpinnings of our lives, such as where our water comes from (Bouma-Prediger 2010). Owing to a lack of authentic experience of encounter, exacerbated by the distortion of encounter itself, arising from a disfiguration of the environment, the way forward is through engagement with "ecological literacy", to achieve "ecolacy".[2]

The pathway towards "ecological literacy" entails paying attention to the interplay between two aspects: pastoral care amidst the contemporary challenges resulting from environmental degradation, and the mediation of the ritual experience in the movement towards "ecological literacy". In revisiting the interesting reflection of Robert Taft on the role of liturgy as the mediation in the gap between the creative hand of God and the hand of Adam reaching back, somewhat hesitantly, in Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, the bearing of creation is evidenced in the encounter between the human and the divine who writes down the overarching narrative of humanity (Farwell 2013, p. 3). Thus, the ritual experience, as the encounter between the human and the divine *par excellence*, attests to the transformation of the person. Yet, what are the ramifications within an ecologically wounded world? If the medium of the encounter includes the enfleshed experience, which

is wounded in itself, how transformative can participation in the liturgical experience really be to the human person if no attention is paid to addressing the woundedness?

2. A Juxtaposition with a Contemporary Reality or a Continuum?

"Obedience with abstinence gives people authority even over wild beasts", attributed to Abba Antony, is one of the laconic sayings characteristic of the Desert Abbas and Ammas (Ben Ward 1984, p. 7). How does this allude to a contemporary life which bears the woundedness of environmental degradation and its repercussions on the lives of individuals? While it may be argued that the desert fathers and mothers lived in a time which is far removed from our lives, there is more than a grain of truth in this wisdom. Perhaps, because in their mysticism, the desert fathers and mothers became "materialists (Chrissavgis 2003, p. 87)", *matter-ialists*, and their wisdom reverberates to our own times. They were, in their exploration of themselves in their experience of God, masters of the experience of the sacred. It is this redemption of materialism, a connectedness which, in the face of God, brings humanity much closer to itself through the tangible and corporeal, which needs to be redressed and retrieved. This re-imagining is the antidote to the mimicry of contemporary materialism and its devastation of the environment. It has been quite customary to attribute damage to the environment to a misinterpretation of Scripture, specifically *Genesis* 1, 28. Yet, as Steven Bouma-Prediger argues, it would be an oversimplification to blame Christianity (without pausing on the great strides of different Christian traditions, such as the Eastern Orthodox in their integration of the environment within their theology or those of the more recent Roman Catholic efforts exemplified in *Laudato Si'* or *Fratelli tutti*) or a misinterpretation of Scripture, especially *Genesis*. Nevertheless, this does not make Christianity itself totally exempt from culpability (Bouma-Prediger 2010).

It is the proper *matter-ial* attitude attuned to God and to the environment which needs to be retrieved in the face of a ceaseless consumption which is divesting the earth of its creative order. Within this perspective, the experience of the sacred of the Desert Abbas and Ammas can be distilled for our analysis, and especially mediated through the liturgical experience.

The liturgical experience is replete with signs, images, passages from Scripture, and prayers which encompass an earthly relationship. The liturgical year follows a cycle of seasons, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, each with its own specific rituals. These seasons tend to coincide with changes in the natural environment, such as the arrival of spring or the harvest season, and the liturgy reflects these changes, expressed in various signs, symbols, and gestures (Francis 2015). The encyclical *Laudato Si',* with its emphasis on the uniquely-coined "integral ecology", reminds us of our dependence on "Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs" (ibid., p. 1). Within the Eastern Orthodox perspective, the Eucharist holds a cosmic significance which views creation as pertaining to God and invites Christians to institute a new relationship with the world (Cann 2021a, p. 148). Indeed, according to the metropolitan John Zizioulas, in his development of a eucharistic ecclesiology, "the Eucharist has a cosmic meaning which calls upon Christians to abandon the role of 'proprietor' over creation and adopt that of 'priest (ibid.; Zizioulas 2012, p. 139).'" This assigns an ontological dimension to the human being's relationship with nature, whereby "by being the priest of creation, he relates to nature by what he is" (Zizioulas 2012, p. 139).

The economy of salvation is inextricably bound to the whole of the created order. The Eucharistic Prayers are replete with examples of God's blessings through creation and redemption. The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer in the Roman Catholic rite reveals a considerable expression of thanks and praise for creation and for the history of salvation, which leads to the culmination in Christ. As Kevin Irwin asserts, "it brings out the universal need for the paschal mystery and the universal effects that flow from it" (Irwin 2023, p. 185). The Preface to this prayer encompasses the whole of creation and the Father, "the source of

the whole of creation" (ibid.). The role of human beings is in the praise of God by joining in the liturgy, culminating in the Eucharist. It can be stated that this prayer is "a worldview in a capsule form" (ibid.).

The offertory prayer is recited by the priest in a low voice:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,

for through your goodness we have received

the bread we offer you:

fruit of the earth and work of human hands,

it will become for us the bread of life.

This resplendence of the cosmos and the corporeality is brought to the table. In taking the bread and the wine, the priest becomes an artist, "... he takes the material world in his hands ... and lifts it up to acquire eternal divine meaning" (Zizioulas 2012, pp. 139–40). The passage from the simple ingredients—the gifts of God—to the baking of the bread and the creation of the wine is a process which in itself is the gift of God. Together with the bread and the wine themselves, this movement towards the transformation of the gifts into the body and blood of Christ through transubstantiation at the consecration attests to the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the worship experience and the interaction of the human and the divine as the meeting ground for salvation.

3. The Movement from *Efface-Ment* to *Trans-Figuration*

Back in the 1960s, from the relative comfort of Gethsemani monastery, the Trappist monk Thomas Merton was already bemoaning the technological advances, with which, even in the acknowledgement of their usefulness to a better quality of life, at the same time, "the monk on the tractor does not see the soil turn, does not smell the earth, does not feel the clods under his feet, does not hear the meadowlark, does not talk to the mule and appreciate her work" (Borgmann 2012, p. 4). Decades later, it would appear that this "rapidification", which runs in tandem with degradation, cannot be reversed. Hailing from a small over-developed island, we can witness the ecological degradation and dispossession in its various forms, together with its toll on various aspects of well-being. Since greed and power are the main driving forces, little attention is paid to the lack of sunlight in one's own home or the lack of green spaces where one can ramble, detach, and reflect, where a person can find the truth of one's self.

In the offertory prayer, elucidated in the previous section, the bread and the wine are the result of the gift of the Lord of all creation, the "fruit of the earth", and the interaction of human beings with that gift. Yet, a few moments later, this prayer is followed by the disquieting detail before the consecration: "... on the night He was betrayed ...". As Brian Bransfield affirms, "all too suddenly, the language of creation and fruit, of nature and goodness seems to disappear and is replaced with an entirely new locus of action: betrayal" (Bransfield 2020). The common denominator of betrayal and the salvific event effected by God is the partaking of food. The consumption of the forbidden food initiated the fall of humanity through original sin. Yet, it is through nourishment, through the Eucharist, that redemption occurs. Returning to the gifts of the bread and the wine, if the fire of betrayal appears to undo the fire in the process of the creation of the bread, it is only the fire of the total kenotic love of God which can reverse the whole process (ibid.).

An honest appraisal of the worship experience extends to paying attention to how the community of believers who gathers for mass is experiencing the process of the betrayal of the world itself and dealing with it. How are the various forms of hurt inflicted on each and every one who participates in the ritual experience verbalised through that same experience? The ramifications of this hurt are evidenced in various ways. These are important hurts which need to be redressed through an incarnate liturgical experience if ever we can speak of an encounter between the human and the divine which transcends

mere ritology. Hence, the inescapable attention to pastoral care before we can even speak of the mediation of the liturgical journey.

This entails, for example, an exploration of the poverty of indigenous people and others deprived of their land and other realities, such as that of a scarcity mindset. *Prima facie*, scarcity in the face of being faced with less to thrive on may appear to extricate the resilience to be more creative, "focusing our attention on using what we have most effectively" (Mullainathan and Shafir 2013). Yet, this process tends to lead to its most negative form, *tunnelling*, the narrowing of the visual field in order to bring what appears crucial in sharp focus (ibid.). Tunnelling has negative implications: "scarcity leads us to tunnel and neglect other, possibly more important, things" (ibid.). It impedes us from focusing on the bigger, overarching narrative which connects us to the earth itself, rendering humanity impervious to the fact that "the Earth does not belong to us: we belong to the Earth", as asserted by Evo Morales, President of Bolivia from 2006 to 2019, during a UN General Assembly.[3]

Diamandis and Kotler's response to such impending "pessimism", on the other hand, is reconfigured in a theory of a potential bid for abundance. Diamandis and Kotler argue that technology has the potential to produce abundance in the world, amidst the current crises. It is a fact that

> By solving our water worries, we're also alleviating world hunger, relieving poverty, lowering the global disease burden, slowing rampant population growth, and preserving the biosphere. Children will no longer be yanked out of school to gather water and the firewood needed to boil water, so education levels will begin to rise. (Diamandis and Kotler 2012)

Yet, this comes with a caveat. While the reliance on technology admittedly has the potential to solve a lot of the world's crises, it may entail a perpetration of the worship of technology, with little attention to the understanding and empowerment of transformation of the human being, at both individual and collective levels. This would little hinge on the mindset transformation necessary in the movement from the misinterpretation of *Genesis* (ibid.).

Unsettling questions need to be asked regarding the symbols in the liturgy themselves in relationship to their experience by believers in the outside world. We should become cognisant of a wider peripheral field through which that symbol operates, and this includes the distortion of the symbol itself wherein it becomes disembodied from its proper ecological status. Thus,

> How … can we presume to immerse the elect in the baptismal bath, anoint them with consecrated oil, or invite them to the table of the Eucharist, without recognizing that the natural signs we use can speak also of the poisoning of the natural world, of unequal access to healthy drinking water, and the social impact of consumption? Can we lead our neophytes forward from the Mysteries without having explored these ambiguities with them? Can we ignore sacramental ecology? (McGrail 2016, p. 56; Francis 2020, p. 11)

Apart from the element of water, the rites and texts of Ash Wednesday include the burning of the leftover palms, rendering them into ashes, in turn to be blessed with holy water, in reference to baptism. (Irwin 2023, p. xi; Guardini 1956, pp. 53–55). The "primal" element of fire, emblematic of Christ's resurrection and restoration of life, is central in the Easter Vigil. Yet the process of burning occurs as a result of devastating wars around the world which are happening at the time of writing. (ibid.), p. xii) The same can be said of the burning of incense and smoke in the constant offering to God. Romano Guardini was speaking in the following terms about the use of burnt incense and smoke: "The offering of an incense is a generous and beautiful rite. The bright grains of incense are laid upon the red-hot charcoal, the censer is swung, and the fragrant smoke rises in clouds." (Guardini 1956, pp. 57–58)

The Israeli–Gaza war and the Russian–Ukraine war are constantly on the headlines, especially made prominent by images of engulfing flames and smoke. This reiterates the fact that "like all other primal elements, when we engage them in the liturgy all have the potential of meaning what is both positive and negative at the same time"(Irwin 2023, p. xiii). How can such elements of fire and smoke be reconnected to their "primal" meaning in the worship experience if they have become visibly associated with destruction and death?

Even in the midst of this reality, we can reiterate the discourse on the relationship between the conceptually real and the tangibly real during the liturgical experience. Clare Johnson affirms that

> Humans need the security of the tangibly real in order to help us to make contact with, comprehend, and accept the conceptually real (the intangible). As our bodies express our innermost selves, so too the tangible aspects of our worship offer modes of expression that provide access to the innermost spiritual realities of our belief system. (Johnson 2012, p. 35)

Hence, the urgency for an authentic participation of the believers. This is a participation which encompasses the total sum of their narratives, while empowering believers to give meanings to these experiences at the intersection of the worship experience with reality, interpret them and transform them. Within the perspective of Eastern Orthodox scholars Alexander Schmemann, Zizioulas, and others, this entails a retrieval of an understanding of humans as liturgical creatures, priests of the cosmic liturgy who offer creation to God as priests of the cosmic liturgy (Cann 2021a, p. 148). As Schmemann affirms unequivocally, "the world was created as the 'matter,' the material of the one all-embracing eucharist and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament" (Schmemann 1998, p. 15). The empowerment mediated through the divine encounter enables human beings to reconfigure their role within creation, that of humanity as a priest of creation, a complementarity to that of humanity as a steward of creation (Zizioulas 2012, p. 139).

4. What *Logiké Latreía*? Towards Authentic Eucharistic Worship

In *Rom* 12, 1, Paul presents the totality of what encompasses proper spiritual worship: "I appeal to you therefore, my brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." While Paul refers to spiritual worship, in Greek, the term *logiké latreía* is employed. We might pause on this term and its iteration and implications for the whole argument. The term *latreía* refers to divine worship, only directed at and given to God. On the other hand, the term *logiké* comes from Logos, the Word, hence the divine. Yet, the term also refers to the rational and the logical. Hence, the authentic worship of God entails offering all our totality, as a living, sacred offering to God and to others. The emphasis of Paul's exhortation in the offering of our bodies and our totality to God entails worship which is incarnate; "the concrete human reality of worship which is anything but disincarnate" (Benedict XVI 2007, p. 70), hence why eucharistic sharing is all-encompassing.

As Benedict XVI affirmed in *Sacramentum caritatis*,

> The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29ff.). There is nothing authentically human–our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds–that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. (ibid., p. 71)

In his development of a eucharistic ecclesiology, Zizioulas provides insights into the existential dimension of the Eucharist as a "true ontology" of the person (Cann 2021b, p. 20). In the celebration of the Eucharist through the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ becomes an existential reality among the gathered community. Authentic personhood is achieved through an "ecclesial hypostasis" wherein the locus of this progression lies in

the Eucharist.[4] This entails a realignment of the position of the human person prior to the reality of original sin, since "this identification of otherness with unity is incompatible with fallen existence, into which we are born as individuals with a clear tendency to seize, dominate and possess being" (Zizioulas 1997, p. 107). Zizioulas affirms that

> The mystery of being a person lies in the fact that here otherness and communion are not in contradiction but coincide. Truth as communion does not lead to the dissolving of the diversity of beings into one vast ocean of being, but to the affirmation of otherness in and through love. (ibid., p. 106)

Yet, what does this entail for the various categories of believers who experience the cry and the lamentation over the various forms of environmental degradation? What are the ramifications for increased ecological poverty? How does this projection into the future from the present rooting communicate hope, especially for the suffering person who no longer hopes? While the liturgy itself is incarnate in so many ways, how can this truth be transmitted to the congregation? If it is, indeed, true that as McGrail states, namely, "each celebration of the Eucharist, no matter how humble the circumstances in which it takes place, impacts the entire created order (McGrail 2016, p. 57)", how is that truth to be conveyed and rendered incarnate and relevant to the pilgrims who step inside sacred space in order to find relevance to their lives amidst their various outpourings of grief?

This would entail "placing the human being at the centre, recalibrating the role it occupies amidst the problem of a technocratic world which has a bearing on the experiences of the human person" (Buttigieg 2023). Hence, the urgency of pastoral care which needs to be addressed by the dialogue of worship with that of the contemporary world towards sacramentality that in itself embraces the whole of the created world, human beings, and the word of God (Johnson 2012, p. 31). This necessitates an honest discernment of how the worship experience can become enfleshed within a disconnected reality wherein in the symbols themselves, the tangible reality wherein they are grounded, and the transcendence which they represent have been sundered.

5. Towards Eco-Literacy through Worship: Eco-Lamentation

Placing the human being at the centre of the healing process is the crux towards re-establishing the worship connection and the healing of the various pains, contrary to an egocentrism of destruction. The faithful need to be made aware of the reality that "attention to the meaning of the ritual entails attention to the different realities faced by the faithful and to the various transitions in life, including celebrations and the vicissitudes" (Buttigieg 2023). Hence, grieving people are empowered to share into the overarching narrative and realise that the ambivalence in feelings and emotions is heard and addressed. It is imperative that room be made for the wide range of emotions expressed by believers.

The recovery of the practice of lament in the worship experience offers a lens into an Israelite and early Christian response to personal and social crises by engaging with God in a dialogic practice of complaint, protest, rage, and mourning (Hessel-Robinson 2012, p. 41). Psalm 74, read on the Sunday of the Twelfth Week of Ordinary Time, expresses one such an example of lament in the face of human-induced destruction. The Scripture itself is replete with various examples of various emotions in the encounter with God, running the gamut from giving thanks to God and praising him to bargaining with him, mourning, protesting, and expressing a cry of lament (Ramshaw 1987, pp. 31–32). The form of lament is present in many forms in Scripture, especially in *Lamentations*, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms.

Understanding the dynamics of the lament has great relevance in our contemporary situation in enabling people to become visible anew. Walter Brueggemann explores three characteristics of lament which render this pertinent to our discourse about relevance and authenticity. First, the lament bestows an "authentic expression" on real and wide-ranging life experiences (Brueggemann 1995, p. 67). Second, the lament attests to the affirmation by ancient Israel that life is beset by all forms of experiences, "... by hurt, betrayal, loneliness, disease, threat, anxiety, bewilderment, anger, hatred and anguish" (ibid.). Third, in its confrontation with the fullness of life, ancient Israelite faith is dialogic. The lament is

addressed to a person (ibid., p. 68). This dialogic aspect, which is much absent from the Christian ritual experience, needs to be given more attention within situations where dialogue entails simply an exchange of niceties. Attention must be given to a "faith that knows that honest facing of distress can be performed effectively only in dialogue with God who acts in transforming ways" (ibid., p. 69). Moving towards paying attention to lamentation in an ecologically disfigured world enables the healing process to take place. It is indeed the case that in some cases, "expressing lament with all its feelings can be the first step in healing" (Smith 2012, p. 97). It would entail a dynamic juxtaposition of human *pathos* with divine *ethos* (ibid.). Only then can real transformation begin, reaching its climax in the Eucharistic celebration.

Significantly, silence plays an important role in the whole process. It allows for the interiorisation and the awareness of the process itself, wherein the worshipper is empowered throughout the whole movement towards becoming the protagonist. We concur with Ivone Gebara, who argues that

> You have to allow for the pain to take over almost completely so that slowly the healing movement can take place and the poetry of prayer and community singing can also assume its place. As we mourn for the crucified and the hungry, tears and wailing are our mad prayer, our hoarse cry, our plea for relief, our only breath. This means being able to welcome the states of the soul and emotions as ingredients to express our liturgies. (Carvalhaes 2021, p. 4)

6. The Restoration of Eco-Literacy through Worship: A Redemption of Symbols

Only once the process described in the previous section has been attended to, can we then move on towards eco-literacy, or "ecolacy". However, we need to redress such questions as follows: "where does the water used in baptism come from? How is this "primal" element of water, the life-giving source, pouring life into each and every member, irrespective of social class?" This is reiterated by Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia*, who argues that "the best ecology always has an educational dimension that can encourage the development of new habits in individuals and new groups" (Francis 2020, p. 58). While formation in and through the worship experience is the way forward, this acquires a greater urgency within this ecological framework.

If we return to baptism, mentioned time and again, the *Didache* makes various provisions for the water used in baptism. "Baptise in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit in *flowing* water" is the mandate in chapter 17 (Milavec 2003, p. 7.1).

Attention is given to the provenance of the water used in baptism. The *Didache* provides an array of provisions of the water to be used, in the absence of a pool of living water. Whatever the provenance and the method of baptism in contemporary practice, "it seems that it was important that water clearly flow from the earth, and that a powerful bodily encounter with that water was enabled" (Stewart 2011, p. 27).

Paying attention to the trajectory celebrated in Psalm 104, for example, and prescribed by the *Didache* would serve very well in a society disconnected from living sources. Paying attention to various water spaces within which baptism occurs would empower the worshipper in realising the full extent of dependence on nature for thriving (Stewart 2011, pp. 27–37). More importantly, in a society and culture which appear devoid of empathy, this would sensitise us to the world around us, in asserting our dependence on it and in empowering us to view our position in this world.

How many can recall a mass celebrated before a sunset? The celebration of liturgy in the countryside is one way towards sensitisation towards a dependence which would serve to cement our relationship with nature. It is an affirmation of the embrace of the universal church through the universality of worship through a local ecological situation. Focus on the food and nourishment along the way would be another example of engaging in connectedness. In the gospels, a number of key events are attested to during eating and drinking. Knowing the source of our food and appreciating the process of its making while also engaging together as a community in its partaking are key to the immersion into the

worship experience when, ultimately, we remember that "at communion, in worship, food is a connection both to God and to the earth" (ibid., p. 59). This testifies to a grounding of the incarnational event, as a connectedness to humanity and to earthliness (Johnson 2012, p. 37). This is a movement towards a resolution of a dichotomy of conflict, towards liberation.

Apart from a number of the psalms highlighted, paying attention to the various texts present in the *Missale Romanum*, *editio typica tertia,* yields a number of prayers related directly to the earth. It is imperative that the faithful be made cognisant of these prayers, which serve to encompass a totality of the human experience. This is, for example, evident in the number of collects which run the gamut of situations in times of lack of rain, earthquakes, storms, and harvests. Attesting to the reality of the expression of the human being as engaging in a relationship, hence as the protagonist, in worship can cement the juxtaposition of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of worship.

These examples attest to an authentic worship experience which can only take place in a twofold dimension, that is, not only formation for the liturgy, entailing traditional study in the liturgy—which includes reflections and formation in the various modes of expression and the various texts which attest to a whole human experience—but also formation by the liturgy itself, the apex of authentic formation, which entails being formed "from participation in the liturgical celebration" (Francis 2022, p. 37). This is the way forward towards an alignment of the life story of each individual in the process of healing within the overarching narrative of healing and salvation, extending to all elements of the created cosmos.

7. A Reconfiguration of *Logiké Latreía*: Conversion and Liberation

This would lead to a renewed and authentic participation in the Eucharist, both the centripetal and centrifugal forces of reparation and restoration effected by God. It enables a glimpse into the kenotic and transcending love which has redeemed the world through humility, the antidote to original sin. Humility entails a renunciation, that is to say, "the abdication of self-rule and self-sufficiency (Guardini 1940, p. 144)". It responds by positive action and by the negation of the effects of pride, hence "by the acceptance of the spiritual principles which the liturgy offers and which far transcend the little world of individual spiritual existence" (ibid.). Inculcating the virtue of humility would lead to a restoration of our place within not only the community, as we realise that the Eucharist provides for hospitality and social justice. As Dominique Rey reiterates, "the Eucharist allows us to find Jesus' face in every person, most especially in the poorest" (Rey 2014). It also enables us to welcome in creation a gift from God and to thank him continuously for it. Each pilgrim who partakes of the Eucharist participates in sharing. Indeed,

> There is great ritual significance in the fact that in the Eucharistic meal all share the same food and drink equally. No one receives a greater portion because of greater wealth or status or power. Those distinguishing characteristics have no currency in the midst of worship. (Mick 1997, p. 52)

Gathering at the table and participating in equal measure according to diverse ministries and roles would enable participation in the divine life and the sharing in the virtues which would repair a broken world, with the scars remaining as a testament to this love, a corollary to the scars on Jesus' glorified body in the post-resurrection narratives.

Conversion and humility lie at the crux of the whole worship experience. Participation in the Eucharist allows for a glimpse of a reality which affirms humility as

> . . . the opposite of arrogance that leads to environmental destruction. Humility involves the recognition that God is Lord and we are servants, not masters. This is a fundamental position of those who worship, for worship implies a God who deserves our praise and our thanks. This may be the most fundamental contribution of Christian worship to the ecological crisis: the recognition that God exists and is the master of the universe. (Mick 1997, p. 34)

This leads, once more, to the Desert Abbas and Ammas, who, cognisant of the complexity of human nature, were especially adept at understanding the virtue of humility as the way which leads to a reconfiguration of the primordial relationship between God and humanity, hence between the cosmos and humanity in its reconfiguration and re-vision of the movement from proprietor to steward, expressed in the ability to tame "wild" beasts. As Chrissavgis reiterates, "If the purpose of fleeing to the desert was to reestablish a lost order, then a reconciliation with all of creation and the reconciliation of this entire world with God was critical" (Chrissavgis 2003, p. 87). The inculcation of this virtue by means of immersion into the overarching narrative written down by God and which finds meaning in the worship experience which is honest and dialogic empowers the individual because it "... provides the lasting motivation to continue the effort because it finds God, the source of all meaning, in the midst of creation. The reverence we owe to God is linked to the reverence we show to the Creator's work" (Mick 1997, p. 40).

8. Conclusions

The ability to tame "wild" beasts encompasses a patient yet active journey towards a rediscovery of the sacred, of the transfiguration abetted by the transformative aspect of ritual in our ability to respond and let ourselves be transformed by it. The transfiguration described in the Synoptic Gospels is not simply of the aftermath or the future but occurs in the present itself. The rediscovery of our proper place in the world can only take place through worship. Through participation in the Eucharist,

> We are able to foresee the dawn of a new world, the cosmos transfigured by adoration. In the Eucharist, we find the possibility of a renewed understanding of the created world. The Eucharist allows us to uncover the basis of integral human ecology; here we find the antidote to radical individualism and collectivism. (Rey 2014)

This entails becoming *matter-ialists*, rather than victims of materialism, and ritual offers scope for that. It is the through the mediation of the tangible with divine grace that sacramentality ensues. In assuming our authentic total beings in authentic worship which gives voice to a plethora of emotions and voices—a *logiké latreía* wherein rites and symbols themselves are redeemed as the place of encounter with God—we cement our relationship with God and reestablish our primordial place in the ecological salvation. Paying attention to the dynamic of worship and the experiences of each and every person pioneers the freedom from individualism which has subjected the environment to degradation and dispossession. Only through this dynamic interplay can "ecological literacy" be achieved, which is inextricably bound to our role and vocation in this world. Once we find ourselves and our vocation, we can then be liberated in order to reestablish our relationship with even the wildest of beasts at various levels. "True Christian liberation is discovered and promoted in liturgy, and only in liturgy", wrote Ignacio Ellacuría (Ellacuría 2002, p. 31)[5].

It is only within the prospect of paying attention to this whole process that we can genuinely concur with the Eucharistic Prayer of Serapion of Thmuis in entreating God to "make us truly alive".

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] The concept of "rugged individualism" is described by Timothy P. O'Malley as one of the malaises afflicting contemporary society, with ramifications in the worship experience. See (O'Malley 2019, p. 28).

[2] For more detail about "ecological literacy" cfr. (Orr 1992, p. 83). Regarding the term "ecolacy," cfr. (Hardin 1985, p. 24).

[3] Morales Ayma's statement given on the Day of Mother Earth (22 April 2009) during the UN General Assembly. See also (Rikard 2014).

[4] The term "hypostasis" for Zizioulas, denotes "person". Hence, in contrast to "biological hypostasis", which is "constituted by the conception of birth of humans, "ecclesial hypostasis" is initiated by baptism. For a more thorough analysis, see (Zizioulas 1997, pp. 50–65).

[5] The original words of Ignacio Ellacuría, in Spanish, are the following: "La verdadera liberación cristiana se descubre y se promueve en la liturgia y sólo en la liturgia."

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