

# Liturgy and the Beauty of the Unknown

Another Place

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# Introduction

It is precisely characteristic of the God of revelation to reveal Himself. The God of love is 'apophatic' not in a 'withdrawal' to a hidden essence ... rather the God of love is apophatic in that He 'brings the one filled by Him to adoring silence'.

(Gawronski 1995: 58)

The purpose of this book is to offer an approach to Christian liturgy for the twenty-first century which takes seriously and highlights its mystical, symbolic and aesthetic constituents. Although largely rooted in my hopes for the future of Roman Catholic liturgy, I trust my position will have important ecumenical and indeed, interfaith implications for the practice of worship. Unlike those who argue that relevance and adaptation to cultural norms are integral to any reinvigoration of liturgy at the present time, the position taken here centres on an aesthetic understanding of worship which releases a transformative movement of the self through liturgical form, allowing an endless and unsatiated encounter with the Unknown. I contend that it is the task of the liturgical Church to offer the embodied presence of the resurrected Christ to the world, a body once disfigured but restored to glory, a body of beauty. Such a task demands an imaginative performance of ritual which encourages worshippers to see the self and the world in a new Christological way, entailing the enactment of a drama of beauty which enthral and attracts. What is required, I argue, is a capacity to symbolise and image the shape of Christ's life through worship, in the hope that an anagogical movement towards an unlimited horizon of the divine will take place. I seek to show that Christian ritual performances must proceed from a symbolic reappropriation of the Christian narrative, which reflects a theology of beauty and a spirituality rooted in apophaticism.

Antony Gormley's sculpture *Another Place* illustrates my argument by offering a visible form to illuminate this liturgical hope and endeavour. It embeds 100 cast iron human figures, naked and life-size, into the sand along the Crosby coast on Merseyside in the North West of England. They stand looking out towards the horizon, a mysterious unknown. Secured in three-metre-deep foundation piles and stretching one kilometre into the Irish sea, they enjoy the open sky as their background. The figures are heavy, resolute, and yet appear light and movable, the enduring body the central focus within the created space. There is a determination and resoluteness about each figure. The sculptor writes, 'In this work human life is tested against planetary time. This sculpture exposes to light and time the nakedness of a particular body, no hero, no ideal, just the industrially reproduced body of a middle-aged man trying to remain standing and trying to breathe, facing an horizon busy with ships, moving materials and manufactured things around the planet.' Children play around them and touch their bodies. Others spray graffiti on their limbs. Some feel them sensually, as objects of beauty; others gaze out, along with the figures, into the unknown. In November 2006, they were to be dug out and released from the landscape to find a new space in New York but a campaign to make them permanent,

next to the regenerative activity surrounding their present location, questioned this move; people wanted them to stay. Later, on hearing about a campaign to get them removed, Gormley commented that *Another Place* can go anywhere. 'I can imagine installing it all round an island in the Outer Hebrides and it would work very well. The piece is all about unknown futures and wishing for them in a variety of ways, hoping that good things will come across the horizon' (*Guardian*, 21 October, 2006: 40). I hope Gormley's sculpture will serve as an analogous expression for the theological and liturgical arguments I put forward in this book, exhibiting as they do a series of human shapes looking out into an unknown horizon, 'another place', mysterious and unknown; a site which is endlessly beckoning and enthralling.

I centre my proposals and concerns around three foundational and interlocking themes, which serve to support my ongoing contentions and conclusions. These are: first, the implications of the *mystical tradition* and in particular, its apophatic strand, as a solid basis for understanding an important dimension and trajectory of liturgy; second, the implications of the concept of *imago Dei* and its association with the *doctrine of deification* in offering a fundamental aim of liturgy and third, the role of *the material and aesthetics* in any substantive theory and practice of liturgy.

The connecting thread throughout the book will be the notions of 'movement' and transformation. By this I imply that any understanding of worship is best served by locating it within the trajectory of divine and human desire, a movement which begins with the 'ecstatic' procession of God's love, made visible in the incarnate Word, encouraging a return movement towards that which is endlessly beautiful. I emphasize that liturgy has the task of repositioning the world and the self in relation to its beatific performance, a vision which lifts participants away from seeing life as a mere lump of existence and which resituates them on a trajectory of desire towards the infinitely unknowable and beautiful. As Underhill underlines in her 1936 classic on liturgy, 'Christian worship is ... a response in which (man) moves out towards Reality, sheds self-occupation, and the finds the true basis of his life' (1936: 339). As a consequence of the position taken, the dialectical relationship between the beauty and sacramentality of the world and the ultimate eschatological vision will be kept to the forefront of my argument, as will the space liturgy inhabits between the visible and invisible, the known and the unknown, that boundary line where 'another place' is felt and experienced.

An echo of my notion of the importance of liturgical movement and orientation is seen in Pope Benedict XVI's critique of Roman Catholic worship after the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. 'Another place' for the present Pontiff consists in recognizing that worship 'reaches beyond everyday life' and gives us 'a share in heaven's mode of existence, in the world of God, and allows light to fall from the divine world into ours' (Ratzinger 2000: 21). Like the hopeful figures in Gormley's sculpture who, bathed in light, look out into the horizon, worship too 'has the character of anticipation. It lays hold in advance of a more perfect life and, in so doing, gives our present life its proper measure. A life without anticipation, a life no longer open to heaven, would be empty, a leaden life' (Ratzinger 2000: 21). This is why Pope Benedict XVI is critical of the priest facing the people in present-day Eucharistic celebrations. The ancient Christian tradition was for both priest and people to face the East, the symbol of the rising sun. But now, unlike Judaism and

Islam, who acknowledge the importance of facing towards their respective sites of revelation, more abstract Western Christian thinking has eliminated this important orientation and looking. If we are to worship the God who both embraces the cosmos and is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves (Ratzinger 2000: 75) – a theme related strongly to this dynamic which I discuss at length in Chapter 2 – then, ‘we should express in Christian prayer our turning to the God who has revealed himself to us’ (Ratzinger 2000: 75–6).

As I argue consistently throughout the book, liturgy must maintain an incarnational and symbolic model, while at the same time allowing for a vital sense of connecting to and reaching beyond that which is concrete and finite. The movement is Janus-faced – from the infinite to the finite and from the finite to the infinite. As Pope Benedict XVI writes,

Just as God assumed a body and entered the time and space of this world, so it is appropriate to prayer – at least to communal liturgical prayer – that our speaking should be ‘incarnational’, that it should be Christological, tuned through the incarnate Word to the triune God. The cosmic symbol of the rising sun expresses the universality of God above all particular places and yet maintains the concreteness of divine revelation. (Ratzinger 2000: 76)

But what matters, as in Gormley’s sculpture, is that we look ‘together at the Lord. It is not now a question of dialogue but of common worship, of setting off toward the One who is to come. What corresponds with the reality of what is happening is not the closed circle but the common movement forward, expressed in a common direction for prayer’ (Ratzinger 2000: 81). Looking at the priest has no importance – looking towards ‘another place’ does (2000: 81).

### **The Movement towards the Unknown – Using and Going beyond the Material and Created Order**

Throughout this book I shall argue that liturgy is best understood within the apophatic tradition of Christian spirituality, a tradition which has emphasized how the overwhelming impact of God’s love brings one most naturally to adoration, often through the experience of silence. I trace, through an extended examination of Denys the Areopagite in Chapter 1, how this foundation of liturgy needs to be reclaimed in the twenty-first century and how the thrust of this tradition in Christian mysticism is rooted in the paradox of the Word made Flesh and by means of the immanence of the transcendent God, the Being who is ontologically independent from finite reality, but who becomes revealed in flesh and blood. Liturgy always reminds worshippers that He who has transformed creation through His embodied kenotic love, enables a movement to begin back from the material to the immaterial, from the known to the unknown, from the seen to the unseen, from the created to the Uncreated. As the Orthodox liturgist Alexander Schmemmann (2003) suggests in his discussions of Byzantine worship, this is essentially a movement of mystery, rising from the material to the spiritual and the sensual to the noumenal, but one which takes the material and sensual as being immensely important to that ascent. I shall argue that a recapturing of this dynamic is liturgy’s challenge for the future.

I will emphasize how the cataphatic always works in association with the apophatic as part of their procedural natures. I will highlight how the material and fleshy, especially in their symbolic and imaged forms, are not only given a special status, but become the redemptive touchstones through which a movement beyond the created order towards a fuller realization of the mysteries of Truth and Beauty occurs. The known acts as the gateway to the Unknown; the expressible lends credence to the inexpressible; the finite leads to the infinite. As the Orthodox theologian Lossky comments, ‘The existence of an apophatic attitude – of a going beyond every thing that has a connection with created finitude – is implied in the paradox of the Christian revelation: the transcendent God becomes immanent in the world, but in the very immanence of His economy, which leads to the incarnation and death on the cross, He reveals Himself as transcendent, as ontologically independent of all created being’ (1975: 14–15).

I argue that it is through the liturgical use of the cataphatic – its symbolic and aesthetic materiality, poetic discourse and ritualized silence of space, gesture and movement – that God becomes concealed and disclosed. Any such concealment and disclosure echo the interplay of the apophatic and cataphatic dimensions of worship, its dual, distinctive dynamic. I therefore refer to those Christian theologians who, rooted in the apophatic tradition, realize the importance of this and who, by implication, acknowledge how any liturgical movement begins with the material and the sensual in the hope of proceeding towards the ineffable and unknown. The dynamic of the material has the propensity to release a movement beyond itself towards that divine silence, to which, as Hederman says, ‘every scrap of revelation, every detail of tradition, points’ (2002: 19).

I discuss how this journey to the silent darkness, the ‘cloud of unknowing’, begins for Christianity with the Word made flesh and how worship assumes the daunting challenge of (paradoxically) enacting and ‘articulating’ that silence. As Davies and Turner insist, ‘negation is never free-standing’ (2002: 3). The flesh speaks the silent Word. It is impossible to understand the role of the apophatic until you have understood the role of the cataphatic (2002: 11–34). Sheldrake, in his discussion of Denys, is accurate to describe them as ‘two sides of the same coin whereby the cosmic cycle of God’s outpouring into creation, and the return of all into the One, demands both an affirmation of the meaningfulness of symbols and, at the same time, a destruction of all symbols for the naked knowledge of unknowing’ (1991: 193). In this regard, apophysis carries a considerable theological weight since it ‘articulates the human response to a divine communicative presence, and it is burdened as much by an excess of presence as it is by an endemic sense of absence’ (Davies 2002: 201). It is also essentially celebratory since it endorses the divine–human communication, witnessed most profoundly in its liturgical expression as the supreme meeting place of presence and absence, silence and Word, yearning and fulfilment. In examining this theme, I consider how the vertical is never separated from the horizontal in worship and how its sacramental materiality is crucial in releasing an anagogic ascent to the divine.

Throughout the book I show how Christian liturgy has at its disposal a range of intensified expressions, including, in particular, its images, symbols and gestures, which allow such an excess of mysterious meaning to unfold. In Chapter 3, in

particular, I emphasize how the dominance given to the visual in the medieval period needs to be reclaimed, since the excess of meaning and presence such social apparatus encourages allows a movement to take place which culminates in a crossing of the boundary of language and materiality, nudging worshippers towards that silence where God is most fully revealed. Such a movement begins through acts of adoration and praise centred initially around the material and concrete, (including its linguistic forms). And because the apophatic emphasizes the ‘limitless criticism’ of language to express the divine, it simultaneously endorses silence as the most appropriate response when language inevitably fails, safeguarding the mystery of the Trinity, which can never be fully expressed *within* the rite. The rite, as a consequence, always points to something beyond itself, to something outside its limits: ‘Successful enactments of rite involve a realisation that something has been effected that speaks from beyond the limit of the rite’ comments Flanagan (1991: 312), and as a result, ‘The apophatic tradition suits best liturgical actions since they operate well under conditions that manifest Godlike qualities in performance signifying what is beyond conceptual understanding’ (1991: 311).

The apophatic tradition within the history of Christian spirituality has always by inference given status to the ‘epistemological’ desire of the liturgical self. To encounter and to ‘know’ God in any substantial manner is only ever possible through acts of love, adoration and praise. Language and rite begin the anagogical movement as they signify that something else *beyond the rite* is responsible for its beauty and life. *Homo adorans* is the primary means of realizing this truth, as worshipping selves of praise respond to the inexpressible love of the Father. *Apotheosis*, due to its emphasis on limitless horizons, always reminds us that our frustrated and committed endeavours of language – even the ritualized language of the body – never have the last word. For in liturgy, theological concepts collapse into prayerful contemplation and ecclesial dogmas become acted out with endless meaning, as our holistic self is engaged and awakened to something beyond its usual place, while in the context of ‘the Word made strange’ (Milbank 1997), and through the ‘language’ of the reverential body, the excess of divine love makes its mysterious, overpowering impact on the space worshippers inhabit. As a consequence, the self begins to expand by its encounter with something much greater than itself through the symbolism and materialism it encounters, which in turn beckons forward an ecstatic movement, a mystical stepping outside the limited or empirical self. As Lossky notes, such a movement ‘is a tendency towards an ever-greater plenitude, in which knowledge is transformed into ignorance, the theology of concepts into contemplation, dogmas into experience of ineffable mysteries. It is, moreover, an existential theology involving man’s entire being, which sets him upon the way of union, which obliges him to be changed ...’ (quoted in R. Williams 2000: 10).

I discuss how this ongoing, ceaseless liturgical movement of ascent entails a metamorphosis of the self through its staged encounter with the divine. In Chapter 2, for example, I demonstrate how some theologians in the Christian tradition have emphasized this as a double movement – outer and inner – entailing an experience of *absolute transcendence and personal intimacy*. Once the self is remembered as *imago Dei*, a tendency towards adoration and thanksgiving begins to emerge. Any such movement, I suggest, is nothing less than a never-ending process of deification, which leads to a subjugation of hubris and the narcissistic self (Lasch 1991) in favour

of an expansion of the divine self. I argue that this change teaches worshippers that there is ‘another place’, ontologically and imaginatively, to which we belong and in which we will find our ultimate happiness; indeed, where our identity is revealed and enjoyed. I contend that this movement back to the beatific vision is the ritual dynamic worship has the task of perfecting and that to embody in reverential action what our nature desires and to know who we are by *experiencing* our devotional and thanksgiving selves, is to learn, through the submissive actions of the worshipping body, our creaturely dependence on the God of our deepest being and desires. This liturgical movement of *ekstasis* in relation to beauty is what this book attempts to plot and capture. It emphasizes God’s incomprehensibility and at the same time, divine and human *kenosis* (self-emptying), and it traces how the Christian life becomes vibrant when worshippers let go of conceptual thinking and step into a new realm of unknowing and *kenosis* towards a fuller Trinitarian life. This is nothing less than a transformation through deification.

If the Church is to release this movement towards the unknowable God of Love and come anywhere close to a reflection and performance of the depth and mystery of divine revelation, then its liturgy must become a corresponding icon of that experience. The life-giving narrative which defies discursive explanation has to find a performance worthy of its task, a daunting endeavour which requires an imaginative and *ffective performance* of the events of salvation. This ‘feeling for’ the narrative of redemption calls for an aesthetically informed re-enactment, one which releases the ability of participants to share in the life of the divine, acted out and imaged before them. It calls for an identification with, and learning from, the sacred images which surround ritual performance.

### **Seeing and Experiencing ‘Another Place’**

But liturgists are mistaken if they assume that the finite (even within ritual forms) can ever come close to an expression of the infinite. The liturgical soul’s ascent is an endless, dramatic journey into difference, a constant and stumbling traversing of the distance towards mystery. However, if the gift of the analogous being is received and appreciated, then that distance can become a movement of ascent which allows an experience of God’s bountiful excessiveness, an anagogic uplifting that moves the self by means of the Spirit towards the divine; but one which never exhausts or outranks the Infinite. Such a movement does not entail alienation for it is a distance of love, and any stepping towards the Absolute, through finite intervals, is always a moving towards the proximate, towards the One who pervades all things and who is at the centre of the self; the divine is always closer than we are to ourselves and more distant than our thoughts can ever imagine (Hart 2003: 194). My discussion of this theme takes place in Chapter 2.

Nevertheless, as I have hinted at earlier, worship never relegates the divine as somehow *totally* outside the cult. The world experienced in liturgy is always co-extensive with the world longed for and sought; indeed, the borderland between two worlds is precisely the space liturgy inhabits. I take seriously Loughlin’s suggestion in his examination of theology, desire and film, that the ritual space of worship, like cinema, is a place where dreams are enacted; the church always offers ‘inside places



where images of an outside other than that from which the viewers have come are shown. When the lights go down, one can see other imagined worlds, other ways of being human' (2004: 53). The Church is akin to Plato's cave where she 'marshals its inhabitants for the participative viewing of images, scenes of dispossessive charity and fellowship' (2004: 54). But what becomes 'deconstructive irony in Plato' becomes in the Church something to be embraced positively, since 'the knowledge of the exterior can be gained only inside the enclosure. The dazzling light of the real is to be seen by the firelight' (2004: 54).

A theme I emphasize is that such 'seeing' is never illusion or pretence, but an encounter with a new reality. Like Antony Gormley's sculpture, the viewing of 'another place' only becomes possible through the concrete figures occupying and using material form, space and light. Seeing herself as the Christian cave, the Church offers a distinctive place where 'another place' might be glimpsed. Her images, symbols and ritual practices become the means, (to use Loughlin's evocative phrase), 'for the imagining of a different reality, or rather for imagining reality differently' (2004: 54). This experience is a sacramental one, because unlike Plato's cave, Christianity locates the divine within the sacred space. The Good and the Beautiful become present. The Church's worship, in using the redeemed materiality of the world, allows 'another world' to be imaged and expressed. It becomes a place for a different kind of seeing and being. The location of 'another place', therefore, starts within worship, the life of that other country bursting forth in the ritual space, setting up a desire for a life which is the only 'real' one, made present through sacred performance. I argue, therefore, that any effective liturgy of the future will always encourage participants to move and feel within the cave, in order to recognize what *ultimately* is without.

With reference to this position, the contested site of the viewing of images in the formation of Christian identity offers an important strand in my argument. I discuss how the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century, which focussed on the use of imaging the divine, became a test case for acknowledging what the apophatic tradition had always maintained – that the material is the vehicle by which the unknown and invisible becomes revealed and disclosed, a belief which has the Incarnation as its witness and defence. The visible allows access to the invisible, the seen a window onto the unseen, the known a trajectory towards the unknown, the light captured in images an avenue pointing towards the 'luminous darkness' of which Gregory of Nyssa speaks (quoted in Daniélou 1962: 29). I agree with Sheldrake who reminds us that, 'The world and human experience is where the encounter with God must begin ... The two-fold movement of divine manifestation to us and our arduous return to God is recognised in what Panikkar calls "true iconolatry"' (1991: 198). Such 'iconolatry' is essential and the liturgy of the twenty-first century must realize this.

## Theology of Beauty

Acknowledging the displacement and repression of beauty in Western culture (von Balthasar 1989; Jantzen 2004).<sup>1</sup> I argue in Chapter 4 for the importance of a

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1 This displacement of beauty due to the preoccupation with death within the Western symbolic was to have been traced in a multi-volume work by Jantzen. Unfortunately, only

theological aesthetics of worship in releasing an endless and inexhaustible traversing to ‘another place’. Not only does such a model assist in appreciating the irreducible ‘givenness’ of the beauty of the world and its claims upon our wonder and surprise, it also reinforces the view that any Cartesian-like certitude or Kantian reason are unable to respond to the world of gratuity and excess. Entrusting ourselves to what is more than and uncontrollable by ourselves, beauty must become a central feature of worship. The unfathomable depths of beauty which beckon worshippers to ever greater meaning in their lives, draw them into radically new ways of being and living in the world (Garcia-Rivera 2003). Frequently I refer to von Balthasar, who has argued that beauty is the last thing the thinking intellect dares to approach (1989: 18), since it dances around the double constellation of truth and beauty, but the modern world has destroyed the once privileged place beauty held and consequently now, the good also loses its attractiveness. I share his alarming thought that the results are potentially catastrophic: ‘Man stands before the good and asks himself why it must be done and not rather its alternative, evil. For this, too, is a possibility, and even the more exciting one: Why not investigate Satan’s depths?’ (1989: 19). But there are further consequences – once beauty has lost its hold, Being itself is under threat. The sure light named by Aquinas is in danger of being snuffed out and the mystery of Being itself is consequently no longer able to express itself.

On the other hand, argues von Balthasar, ‘When it is achieved, Christian form is the most beautiful thing that may be found in the human realm’ (1989: 28). We see this in the saints’ lives but ‘in our time our eyes (like those of Rilke’s “Panther” as he paces his cage) seem to be “so tired from endlessly counting the bars” that even these most sublime figures of human existence can hardly snatch us from our lethargy’ (1989: 28–9). The Christian life entails living according to values glimpsed in ‘another place’, an experience which calls forth a disciplined, contemplative and prayerful response. Contemplatives might become ‘fools’ and many ‘will attempt to explain their state in terms of psychological or even physiological laws (Acts 2: 13)’, but they ‘know what they have seen, and care not one farthing what people may say’ (von Balthasar 1989: 33); their attitude towards beauty calls forth a pneumatic existence which entails a worshipping self, often spent in ‘spiritual psalms, hymns, odes, singing through grace to God in your hearts (Col 3.16)’ (1989: 33). Von Balthasar claims that on beholding the form we are enraptured by our contemplation and then recognize form as the splendour and glory of Being. Drawn in by its depths, we are transported to them. But the horizontal is always indispensable: ‘so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in such a way that we leave the horizontal from behind us in order to plunge (vertically) in to the depths’ (1989: 119). Denys and St John of the Cross – the two theologians who relied most consistently on the apophatic method – knew this and never divorced the apophatic from the cataphatic: ‘They could exalt the vertical to such a degree only because they never let go of the horizontal’ (1989: 125).

I also claim that there is a relation between the form of revelation and the form of beauty. And this is why I demonstrate the importance of the aesthetic constituent

of liturgy and its potential to create this form. Liturgists, in their desire to represent the awesome beauty of the One made flesh – the face of beauty – must take the aesthetic nature of worship seriously. In Chapter 4, I discuss what such an emphasis on the iconic beautiful face of Christ might entail. I also contend that liturgical representations of beauty must find an affective mode of communication, if worship is to be transformative. The impact of the liturgy becomes, therefore, dependent upon creative modes of delivery and receptivity. In company with Cottingham (2005), I claim that a religious response to the salvific story operates very differently within changed modes of delivery. For example, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* is different to a discussion of the story of redemption in a philosophy seminar. Modes of receptivity vary considerably depending on the type of delivery used; the way we perceive reality will depend upon the mode in which we receive it. Expressive 'showings' of liturgy reflect this and determine the way we perceive the world. I argue that the liturgy offers such a way of 'seeing' the world and how its affective method of communication is crucial. Thus, the use of images, symbols and signs – the imaginative, aesthetic and expressive vehicles of 'imaging' the divine – become crucial for the 'felt' experience of the invisible world liturgy offers. Once worship starts to communicate such an affective response, worshippers learn to feel the story of salvation and to perceive the world and self in new ways. Liturgical worship shares with all ritual action this character of a work of art, as ritual participants become transported to a different world through the use of symbolic materiality (Underhill 1936: 111).

### Image and Mystery

In discussing the task of liturgy to encourage a movement into divine mystery in relation to and then beyond the material, I challenge those Protestant reformers who failed to recognize the disclosure of beauty and mystery rooted in the created order and humanity's selfhood. The mystery which the reformers attempted to preserve through their radical insistence on God's sovereignty collapsed into a dismissive philosophy of negation, where all signs of God's beauty in the natural world were banished, or at least scrutinized for absolute proof. Blond has reminded us that Luther's position consists in faith fleeing 'from the objectivity of cognition' and that once methodological negation becomes the only path to a non-idolatrous understanding of God, 'the original intuition of Luther, the attempt to preserve God's mystery, will be lost, as this mystery is not allowed to show itself except in denials that human beings can approach it' (1998: 289). I show how Luther's attempt to preserve God's mystery ends in the loss of mystery itself, since no disclosures are allowed. Such an interiorization of faith is not based on a concept of *imago Dei* but primarily on a scrutiny of the heart, coupled with the denuding of the external world of any signs of God's presence.

To extend this discussion about materiality and the nature of the divine self begun in earlier chapters, I demonstrate in Chapter 5, the relationship between liturgy, mystery, world and self, by referring to those figures, both East and West, whose work points to the importance of this dynamic, in particular, Maximus the

Confessor and, more recently, Rahner and Evdokimov. The historical relationship which has existed between Christian mysticism and its liturgical (and biblical) roots is recalled. Drawing from Bouyer's work (1990), I argue that it is impossible to understand the development of worship without seeing its connection to mystery. Pre-Christian pagan rites were only made sense of by those who had been initiated into the mysterious secrets of the rite, those with privileged access to a world that had no meaning without an induction into what those 'mysteries' could signify and disclose. Rites were not revelatory performances for everyone nor easy *entrés* into the truth. The Greek word *mystikos* means things hidden, concealed behind closed doors. Such hidden things were only recognized by the initiated and then only subtly and prayerfully, through gradual absorption over time by means of its manifestations of beauty and goodness. As I demonstrate in Chapter 1, Denys goes as far as to suggest that the revealed things of God must be *kept* from the uninitiated. One of the reasons for using symbols in the liturgy and the Bible is that those with initiatory powers and perceptions may be raised to a new realm of spiritual knowledge and understanding.

I trace how it is impossible to understand mysticism without appreciating its liturgical, (especially Eucharistic) and biblical heritage. By the fourth century the word 'mystery' refers explicitly to Christian rites. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, calls the Eucharist a 'mystical action', while Gregory of Nazianzus refers to the altar as 'a mystical table' (quoted in Bouyer 1990: 162). Sacraments were mystical events brought about by the use of the symbolic. The baptized, according to Gregory of Nyssa, are those regenerated by a 'mystical economy', while baptism, according to Eusebius, is a 'mystical bath' (quoted in Bouyer 1990: 178). The later use of the iconostasis in the churches of the Middle Ages was aimed precisely at expressing this mystery of the celebration, its deepest meaning, 'the presence of Christ and of his Mystery *in His Mystery, with us, indeed in us*' (Bouyer 1990: 163).

In relation to this dynamic my argument is also concerned with recentring the doctrine of divinization secured through ritual action, a theme largely forgotten in the West. Bouyer's notion that 'The catecheses of the fourth century all start from the Pauline idea that the mystery of Christ must have its final fulfilment in ourselves, and that it is by way of the sacraments that it is extended to us' (1990: 164), supports my contention. Liturgical rites are mysteries in the sense that the Scriptures are mysteries: they contain within them the mysterious life-giving truth of Christ. As the process of deification unfolds through ritual, participants become the adopted sons and daughters of the Father, even to the point of becoming other 'Christs'. As Cyril of Jerusalem comments on the anointing with oil, 'Having become, then, partakers of Christ, you yourselves can be called Christs, anointed ones, and it is of you that God has said, "Touch not my Christs" ... and everything in you has become in the image of this Christ of whom you are the image' (1990: 165). The rites of the pagan mysteries became replaced by the gift of Christ's love and God's grace, the means of attaining a new divine life reminiscent of existence before the Fall. As Gregory of Nazianzus poetically puts it in one of his sermons when describing baptism, 'Jesus, coming up from the waters, has brought back with him the fallen world, and he sees the skies open which Adam has closed, for himself and his descendents, as the flaming sword had closed paradise' (quoted in Bouyer 1990: 168).

The transformation secured through baptism is often described as a raising up to a new identity and the saving of the divine image. For Gregory of Nazianzus this is no less than becoming God's sons and daughters, an intimate part of the Trinitarian relationship. He writes to his brother Caesarius,

I must be buried with Christ, rise again with him and inherit heaven with him, become God's son, become God! That is for us the great mystery. That is what it means to us that God became incarnate, a poor man, for us. He came to raise up the flesh, to save his own image, to put men together again. (Quoted in Bouyer 1990: 168)

This 'putting together again' for Leo the Great entails recognizing our dignity, our likeness to the divine nature. The life worth living is one which in its *transitus* from the earthly realm to the kingdom, secured by ritual absorption into the paschal mystery of Christ, allows a raising up and return. Like Moses and his followers the baptized are given a new life in a new land. Denys's *Mystical Theology* was deeply influenced by both Gregory of Nyssa and St Nazianus in their use of the Exodus analogy and such a parallel was enriched not only by its Jewish sources and by St Paul himself, but also by the influential *Homilies on Exodus* by Origen.

Schmemmann argues that by the end of the fourth century 'The cult became more and more a sacred action in itself, a mystery performed for the sanctification of those participating (2003: 127). It 'gradually became set in a new "framework" and became overgrown with ritual actions, designed to stress its "mysteriological" essence' (2003: 127). Later 'this mysteriological liturgical piety expressed itself mainly in the idea of consecration or initiation ...' (2003: 129). Thus, 'The idea of consecration or initiation is connected in the most profound way with the concept of mystery. One is initiated into the mystery – and the mystic, as one who is initiated ... is set over against the uninitiated' (2003: 129). The experience, therefore, of an invisible, objective world, 'another place', was only secured by an initiated, ontological entry into the liturgy allied to an understanding of the Word. Christian rites carried forward this emphasis on mystery offered to those initiated into the cult and, through this means, participants not only caught a glimpse of a new reality, but also became transformed into other Christs. I show how this is what the practice of Christianity was *and is*: to be offered and receive revelatory disclosures of the things of God which lay hidden but accessible to the initiated by means of established rites –and to be ontologically transformed by them.

In Chapter 5, by marshalling, in particular, Rahner's theology and key Orthodox liturgical voices, I extend this theme of the divine mystery at the heart of human selfhood and the world.<sup>2</sup> I show how, as a Jesuit Roman Catholic theologian, deeply influenced by the Ignatian spirit, Rahner saw the spiritual life as an encounter with

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2 Vatican Council II's document, *Gaudium et Spes*, repositioned notions of grace within the realm of human history. This pastoral text, in keeping with the overall aim of the Council, emphasized the presence of the Spirit outside the Judaeo-Christian realm, a presence pervading the whole of human life. For Rahner, earlier understandings of nature and grace became little more than externally imposed operations of sacramentalism, what he termed 'extrinicism'. The start of the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World states: 'Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo' in the hearts of Christians (Flannery 1992: 903). The

the mystery of the self and the world. I discuss his view that any such mystery never manifests itself at a distance but in nearness. But that does not mean it is no longer a mystery: ‘On the contrary, the mystery is there and most truly itself, radically nameless, indefinable and inviolable. Grace is therefore the grace of the *nearness* of the abiding *presence*; it makes God ... incomprehensible’ (Rahner 1966: 56). While we think ‘that comprehension is greater than being overwhelmed by light inaccessible, which shows itself as inaccessible in the very moment of giving itself; we have understood nothing of the mystery and of the true nature of grace and glory’ (1966: 56).

The liturgical challenge is to accept this love, adore the mystery and achieve blessing through an anagogical ascent. Not to, is to be tempted to fall into adoring our own idolatrous image of God, an image made according to our own measure. The true image is witnessed through a journey of interiority. As Gregory of Nyssa reminds us: ‘Beatitude consists not in knowing something about God but in having Him within us’ (quoted in Lossky 1975: 38). Such an experience is described as darkness. For Rahner, true religion is always the facing up to mystery and the basis of religion adoration and love, the ‘gathering up of all things in love within its own unity’ (1971: 241). Here the apophatic situates itself within the worshipping self, for it is in the abandonment to the mystery of human living that we come to realize the mystery which is beyond all things and to which our most natural response is awe and adoration.

Besides drawing from important theologians and liturgists, I also bear in mind how any liturgical hopes for the future, especially those involving aesthetics, must take due regard of gender. The work of Grace Jantzen is of importance here and reminds readers about the excessive privileging of ‘male’ reason and cognition and the detrimental effect this has had on the development of aesthetics within the Western symbolic. Jantzen is right to insist that,

What is urgently required is a theology of beauty; a theology not based on the standard formulations of doctrine and practice of the Christendom of modernity but on a divine horizon in which alterities of gender, economic, and ethnicity are allowed to destabilise our comfortable assumptions, and in which the ethical and aesthetic considerations generated by these alterities shape the theology as surely as they are shaped by it. (2002: 428)

The gendering of aesthetics in antiquity and its influence on later Christian thinking has meant that beauty has invariably been exclusively associated with the next world and that this immortal realm was conceptually linked with the male mind and the spirit. The female could never be part of this since she was always associated with birth, the body and death. Von Balthasar never mentions this historical bias and his theology suffers as a result.<sup>3</sup> I hope my vision of the liturgy of the future involving the ‘divine horizon’ of which Jantzen speaks, recognizes this critique even where

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whole of humanity is linked by its common search for goodness and truth and what it strives for is nothing other than the truth which resides in God.

3 See Beattie’s formidable text *New Catholic Feminism* (2005), which attempts to expose the dangerous instabilities of von Balthasar’s theology, in particular, ‘its violent sexual undercurrents’ (2005: 13).

it was not possible to extend discussion of the complex implications involved. Perhaps my view that liturgy inhabits a borderline space between the material and the immaterial might go some way in destabilizing this divide, although I make no claims that this book addresses this important issue in any substantial way. My discussion also notes the contributions from the Continental tradition, where there is generally far more appreciation of how word and image are linked together in discussions of aesthetics and how an emphasis on the former invariably gives undue weight to cognitive models of knowledge and understanding (Jantzen 2002). This is why in Chapter 6, I give considerable space to the work on aesthetics by Dufrenne and point to the remarkable contribution of Cixous in appreciating the power and value of the painter.

In summary then, in Chapter 1 I begin by discussing Denys's apophatic theology of worship as a movement back to the source of life which lies hidden beyond thought, form and being. I show how his emphasis on adoration and homage is situated within a theology of liturgical (and biblical) symbolism which allows an anagogical movement of return to occur. This is accompanied by a sacramental appreciation of all reality and calls for both a penetration and use of the created order and a movement of transcendence beyond it. The movement entails a journey from plurality and difference to unity and simplicity and is an ecstatic one whereby the self steps out of its security and enters the unknown. The progression is an act of clearing where we are encouraged to become like sculptures removing every obstacle to the ascent.

I then move on to discuss the work of St John of Damascus on divine images, the eighth-century theologian deeply influenced by Denys. Both suggest that images and symbols of beauty are indispensable means of conveying the ineffable and encouraging memory of who we are in relation to Christ. Images are divine veils which reveal to the senses things which lie beyond. The Incarnation demands such representations: 'The beauty of images moves me to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God' writes John of Damascus (quoted in Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 1994: 266). They assist in imprinting in the heart's memory what is celebrated in the liturgy.

Next I discuss the medieval Victorines, to demonstrate how in bringing Denys's theology to the West they combined a sacramental insistence with a unique symbolic imagination. Influenced by Denys's definition of symbol as a visible form participating in invisible matter, they succeeded in recapitulating the richness of the apophatic tradition within their monastic-liturgical context at the Abbey of St Denis in Paris. Throughout Chapter 1 I also attempt to show how the anagogical movement within worship begins with the acquisition of the symbolic imagination and an appreciation of the image and the sacramental value of the created order. The liturgical challenge of the future is to demonstrate how such a judicious use of the material within ritual spaces secures a journey towards that which is beyond categorization and expression.

In Chapter 2 I focus on the movement of interiority which liturgy has the task of promoting. In order to begin any liturgical movement of return, it is important to appreciate who we are in relation to the One like whom we might become. Any experience of transcendence is simultaneously an experience of intimacy, of

recognizing our dependence on and likeness to the One we adore. By focussing on the work of four key spiritual writers – St Augustine of Hippo, St Aelred of Rievaulx, William of St Thierry and St Teresa of Avila – I argue that the process of liturgical transformation rests upon a realization that we are made in the image of God. What the four writers have in common is their ability to reactivate the memory of who we are and the implications this recognition has for personal transformational change. Later chapters will suggest how liturgy endorses and further encourages this recognition.

Chapter 3 consolidates some of the findings of Chapter 1 concerning the importance of the image in liturgical settings for any analogical movement. It traces the complex and contested site of the use of images within the Christian tradition, pointing to their importance for securing an affective experience of divine presence and a recognition of ‘another place’ which worshippers sought within liturgical contexts. It takes an extended example from the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral to demonstrate the way in which the architectural symbolism became a visible means of communicating the multi-layered theology of martyrdom and life after death.

In Chapter 4 I emphasize the movement of desire towards beauty within liturgical spaces. A liturgical theology of beauty is emphasized as being indispensable for any substantial model of worship in the twenty-first century. With reference to the work St Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus and key Orthodox voices on beauty, I argue that liturgy has the task of presenting a form of beauty which is reflective of the form of revelation. Liturgy’s challenge is to create an expression of beauty which allows the ineffable to emerge through its signs and symbols, action and stillness, Word and silence, a dynamic analogous to the French film director Robert Bresson’s insight about the power of images to disclose a sense of mystery, presence and silence, where each image becomes transformed by the next (Hederman 2002: 60–63).

In Chapter 5 I extend the liturgical movement of mystery by a discussion of Maximus the Confessor and Karl Rahner. Progressing the argument on beauty to include mystery, I first trace Maximus’s unique incarnational apophaticism and its bearing on liturgical thinking. I then move on to discuss Rahner’s transcendental theology, emphasizing his insistence on how humanity stands before the *mysterium* and its implications for liturgical expression. Rahner’s examination of liturgy as an extension of the mysticism of everyday things and of the ultimate depths of life, including its laughter and tears, concludes the chapter.

In Chapter 6 I outline a movement of aesthetics, drawing largely from the work of the French phenomenologist Dufrenne and other key theorists in aesthetics. I argue that his contention that the ‘expressed’ transfigures the ‘represented’ has significant implications for liturgy. I outline the importance of the mode of liturgical delivery which entails a multi-layered dynamic of symbols and aesthetic categories which have the potential to ‘affect’ participants, leading to a transformed way of perceiving the world. Throughout the chapter I argue for the analogous relationship between liturgy and aesthetics, a relationship which has the potential to transform the practice of worship.