



Introduction

What Is Pastoral Liturgics?

This introduction to Christian liturgy is a pastoral liturgical handbook. I will define liturgy in the first chapter. But what does it mean to be pastoral? One dictionary defines pastoral as an adjective referring to the lifestyle of shepherds and other pastoralists such as cowboys as they move livestock around large areas of land according to seasons and availability of water and food. Since Christian leaders have been called “pastors” (shepherds), there is something in this definition that can help us understand what it means to be pastoral, especially in the liturgy.

Pastoral leaders (lay as well as ordained) have the responsibility of moving the assembly to the sources of nourishment—word and sacrament—and provide the kind of exercise—praise and prayer—that keeps the flock spiritually healthy. Providing what the flock truly needs sometimes involves moving it in directions in which it doesn’t want to go, as real shepherds know from experience. The people need to hear sermons that challenge their assumptions as well as comfort them (in the biblical sense of strengthening). Pastoral leaders have sometimes striven to increase the frequency with which the people receive Holy Communion, which also means that for Protestants the sacrament needs to be celebrated more frequently. While this has sometimes been a source of contention, the ordained minister of the word and the sacraments is under orders to preach the word and administer the sacraments.

Pastoral liturgy is the study and application of liturgy in the actual life of the church. It explores the nature of worship as constitutive and expressive of the Christian faith and applies these insights and commitments in concrete worshiping communities. Pastoral liturgy grounds practice in the history of liturgy and the theology of worship while being sensitive to the needs and resources of the local community of faith. These needs may be related to the cultural background of the assembly. Resources may refer to the gifts of time, talent, and treasure that the assembly has at its disposal, which may be extensive or limited. Quite frankly, too many small parishes want to do the kind of liturgy that can only be performed in a cathedral church. It is a matter of pastoral leadership to discern what the local assembly is capable of doing with the personnel and finances it has and guide the assembly to doing its public work well.

Providing this guidance also requires pastoral leaders to be knowledgeable of the liturgical tradition. This introduction attempts to organize the knowledge of the tradition that pastoral leaders should have. But it is only an introduction. Worship leaders have to dig deeper. To that end I have appended to each chapter suggestions for further reading.

The field of liturgical studies is becoming more diverse as time passes, as can be seen in the array of seminar groups in the North American Academy of Liturgy. I will try to make this introduction as ecumenically broad as possible while also providing information on specific liturgical uses. The specifics assume that an ecumenical practice has developed, especially in the liturgical churches of the West, which is manifested in the orders and rubrics of various denominational worship books and liturgical manuals. I hope that this introduction will serve an ecumenical purpose, especially in those traditions based on the historic Western rite.

While I have been formed in this ecumenical liturgical tradition, I am aware that another ecumenical worship tradition has developed in Western Christianity that the late Methodist liturgist James White called “frontier worship.” That tradition provides an order which is used in the evangelical revival tradition, in many African American churches, in seeker services, praise and worship services, and to some extent in Pentecostal worship. I will refer to it, but I admit up front that my experience of this tradition is limited.

Because I intend this handbook to be a practical manual, I have organized the information in this book under questions that any ordained pastor or layperson might ask. The questions are the subheadings of the chapters and are listed in the table of contents. The index will indicate where to find information on more discreet topics. I have also appended a chronology of events and documents in the history of Christian liturgy and a glossary of liturgical terms.

For further reading: Other introductions to Christian liturgy

Hatchett, Marion J. *Sanctifying Life, Time, and Space: An Introduction to Liturgical Study*. New York: Seabury, 1976.

Jones, Cheslyn, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, S.J. *The Study of Liturgy*, rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 (1978).

White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990 (1980).