LITURGICAL CATECHESIS FOR A SECULAR AGE: APPROPRIATING WORSHIPFUL DISPOSITIONS

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Abstract: Religious educators have presumed that liturgy is a privileged media for initiation and formation into a faith community. In this essay, I offer an alternative account of liturgical catechesis through a conversation with Charles Taylor and Clifford Geertz. I conclude from this discussion that liturgical prayer, in order to foster what Romano Guardini calls a forgotten way of doing things, requires a theological and spiritual formation.

The sun has just set. Darkness begins to drape the nearly empty church. The small parish community gathers outside around a newly lit fire, sparks ascending into the night sky. A large candle is held beside this now growing flame. Blessings are spoken. Incense joins the smoke of the fire, diluting the toxic fumes with its sweet perfume. The hefty candle becomes the leader of the procession into that sparse space, enlightening the aisle of the once dark church. The deacon proclaims, “Christ our light,” and the ecclesia responds, “Thanks be to God.” The light of the candle is shared, tapers lit throughout the church. Twice more Christ is proclaimed as the light of the world and the church responds in gratitude. The candle is placed into its position at the front of the now iridescent church, and from the mouth of the deacon the opening notes of the Exsultet resound. With the words of this song, this chorus of praise that incarnates the exuberant joy that Christ has enlightened this night as the night of our salvation, the massive candle becomes the Paschal candle. In this act of ecclesial remembering, the great Vigil commences. The community sits with open ears to ruminate upon the wisdom of God creating, saving, and wooing humankind through all ages. Until the fullness of time, that sublime act, when Christ died upon the cross and was raised from the dead three days later. The risen Christ overflows this night into those sacramenta of redemption: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, and
Alleluias proclaimed through the morning watch. This, indeed, is the night, echoing those eschatological notes from the Exsultet, that “shall be as bright as day, dazzling is the night for me, and full of gladness.”

Yet, what would it take for a community to “participate” in the Vigil in this fruitful way? As any pastoral minister, liturgist or not, is aware, physical participation in liturgical action (“being there”) does not necessarily culminate in spiritual participation. In fact, this desire for spiritual participation was precisely the concern of Romano Guardini in that classically quoted letter to the German bishops:

The question is whether the wonderful opportunities now open to the liturgy will achieve their full realization; whether we shall be satisfied with just removing anomalies, taking new situations into account, giving better instruction on the meaning of ceremonies and liturgical vessels or whether we shall relearn a forgotten way of doing things and recapture lost attitudes.¹

In this brief essay, I would like to suggest that in order to foster this type of participation, one that recalls a “forgotten way of doing things,” there is a need for a renewed approach to liturgical catechesis that is explicitly theological and spiritual. It is not enough, in the present context, to offer the history of a liturgical rite or sacrament, as well as the meaning of its various texts and actions.² Instead, liturgical catechesis is about teaching a way of perceiving, a means of seeing and understanding the world through theological eyes. It is fundamentally a matter of fostering liturgical dispositions that enable Christians to engage in the spiritual oblation at the heart of the Catholic liturgical tradition.³

¹ Romano Guardini, “A Letter from Romano Guardini,” Herder Correspondence (August 1964), 239.
² For this approach to liturgical catechesis, see Catherine Dooley, “Liturgical Catechesis: Mystagogy, Marriage or Misnomer?” Worship 66 (1992), 386-97.
³ Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 12.
This essay proceeds in the following way. First, I situate liturgical prayer within its present context of secularism as discussed by Charles Taylor in his *A Secular Age*, suggesting (based upon Taylor’s study) that the liturgical-sacramental prayer of Catholicism is something that needs to be taught in light of the epistemology of secularity. Then, I turn to one account of ritual action, in dialogue with Clifford Geertz’s ritual anthropology, to determine what is required from the human person in order to fruitfully perform ritual prayer. Formative participation in ritual prayer requires both cognitive and motivating dispositions, ways of knowing and acting implicit within the liturgical rite. From this two-fold examination of secularity and ritual theory, I conclude this essay with implications for teaching worshipful dispositions in a secular age within the Catholic tradition.

**LITURGICAL PRAYER IN A SECULAR AGE**

In recent years, questions of secularity have moved from the realm of political philosophy to epistemology and hermeneutics. This renewed attention to the effects of secularity is best represented in Charles Taylor’s genealogy of secularism, as found in his *A Secular Age*. At the commencement of this work, Taylor sets forth a three-fold typology of secularism. Secularization 1 is the classic argument that religion has retreated from the public sphere such that the art of governing, of discerning the good for the *polis*, is not the exclusive work of any religious body. Yet, according to José Casanova, this type of secularization has actually led to a reinvigoration of religion in public life. The new public locus of the church is not the state or political society but civil society as a whole, allowing for more effective public action as was

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evident in the Church’s role in the collapse of communism in Poland and the American bishop’s political engagement on issues such as abortion, nuclear warfare, and the economy.\textsuperscript{5}

Secularization 2 is evident in the claim that religion is gradually retreating from the realm of human consciousness as a whole. The primary evidence for this retreat of religion is the falling off of religious belief and practice in European society.\textsuperscript{6} The English sociologist of religion, Grace Davie, has critiqued this description of secularization for its failure to account for the complexities of European religion, as well as religious belief throughout the world.\textsuperscript{7} Most Europeans, for example, are not particularly hostile toward religious belief or practice. Rather, in Europe a vicarious religion is on display. Davie writes, “For particular historical reasons…a significant number of Europeans are content to let both churches and churchgoers enact a memory on their behalf…more than half aware that they might need to draw on the capital at crucial times in their individual or collective lives.”\textsuperscript{8} Further, looking at the rest of the world, including the modern United States and Korea, one can see a world ablaze with religious belief.\textsuperscript{9}

Taylor, recognizing the deficits of these accounts of secularization, offers a third mode. Western secularization is in transition from a society in which belief in God is inevitable to one where it requires a tenuous decision. Taylor writes, “So secularity 3…consists of new conditions of belief; it consists in a new shape to the experience which prompts to and is defined by belief; in a new context in which all search and questioning about the moral and spiritual life much


\textsuperscript{6} Taylor, \textit{A Secular Age}, 2.


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 141.
proceed.”10 In other words, every believer knows that his or her identity *qua* believer is only one option among many others, including an immanent humanism, a plurality of religious postures toward the transcendent, and a non-religious, anti-humanism.11

Yet, what are these new conditions of belief, and how did they come about? Taylor tells the story of this third mode of secularization through a narrative of disenchantment. Disenchantment is a disappearance of God’s felt presence related to the self, the society, and temporality.12 The disenchantment of the self takes place, for Taylor, through the development of the buffered self. Taylor writes, “For the modern buffered self, the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meaning of things are those defined in my responses to them.”13 In the enchanted world, the self was porous. Taylor describes the difference as one between the ancient and medieval world’s conception of possession as involving evil spirits, while the modern world prefers to speak of mental illness.14 In the former instance, the only cure would have been some religious ritual. In the latter, undertaking therapy becomes the source of healing.15 This shift brings about the development of a richer interior life and a sense of self-authorship, while also making it more difficult for a person to experience the world as mediating God.16

The disenchantment of society is a result of the disenchantment of the self. Taylor writes, “The social orders we live in are not grounded cosmically, prior to us, there as it were,
waiting for us to take up our allotted place; rather society is made up of individuals, or at least for individuals, and their place in it should reflect the reasons why they joined in the first place.\textsuperscript{17} Society, once seen as having some \textit{telos} discerned in its relationship to God and an enchanted world, becomes rational, founded on a contract either as offered by God or as discerned through human ingenuity.\textsuperscript{18} As this society is set up, it turns out to be remarkably effective, making Deism a credible religious option.\textsuperscript{19} In other words, why is any society in need of God when human flourishing is accomplishable through reason and order? This shift, while leading to an affirmation of ordinary human life and rights, also may develop into an instrumental individualism.\textsuperscript{20} That is all societies, including religious ones, are there for the satiating of individual needs.

The final space of disenchantment is temporality. In enchanted societies, there was the co-existence of ordinary time and higher time, including the celebration of Carnival, the liturgical rituals of Christians, and even the narratives of the founding of a particular nation.\textsuperscript{21} Yet, with the disenchantment of the self and of society, these higher times have become rare, reserved for sporting events and concerts. Time becomes an instrument, a means of measuring the progress made by the individual self or the collection of individuals within the political and economic body.\textsuperscript{22} In this context, human beings experience a crisis in meaning making, unable to connect the narratives of their forebears to their own life, a prime technology of meaning for ancient and medieval societies.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 540.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 271.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 291.  
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 541.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 55-57.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 714.  
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 718-19.
Employing Taylor’s account of the disenchantment of self, society and temporality, it is not difficult to show how some liturgical event, like the Easter Vigil, is difficult to perform in a fruitful manner for the Christian dwelling within the consciousness of a secular age. The initial rites of this Vigil presume divine mediation. That a candle may be a sign of Christ. That it is Christ who baptizes. That it is the real presence of Christ (mediated in bread and wine) who comes to consume and hence be consumed into the life of the Church. This mediation assumes certain “things” that each person would know about this God, what the Church calls the regula fidei, the rule of faith. Further, it is incredibly difficult for the modern person to remember in an anamnetic way: that this night could be the night, which defines all nights. Time in western society is linear, and human beings interpret time in this way unless gradually taught otherwise. Thus, the role of the pastoral minister concerned with liturgy, whether catechist or liturgist, in school or church, is to develop the proper dispositions within the human person that allow the Christian to engage in fruitful liturgical prayer in the midst of this secular age. Ways of seeing and knowing that move the Christian beyond a secular frame of reference to a Christian one. Yet, what are these ways of seeing and knowing that are necessary for fruitful liturgical prayer? Attention to the field of ritual studies may assist in answering this question.

Cognitive and Motivating Dispositions

How does ritual work in passing on the essential beliefs of a culture? In his classic article, “Religion as a Cultural System,” Geertz presents his theory of ritual functionality within the context of his broader anthropology of religion. To understand Geertz’ approach to ritual requires some prior reflection upon this definition of religion. Religion, according to Geertz, is:
(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [sic] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of facticity that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.24

By a symbol, Geertz means some observable object, act, or relation that operates as a carrier of cultural meaning.25 Each religion is a system of these meanings that serve as a model of and for cultural thought and behavior.26 In fact for Geertz as an anthropological observer, there is really no distinction between a religion and a culture, since both are systems of symbols that come to be interpreted by the anthropologist using the same method.27

Of course, these systems of symbols are not merely cognitive carriers of meaning. They elicit moods and motivations for persons that make cultural meaning possible in the first place. Religious symbols shape the world “by inducing in the worshipper a certain distinctive set of dispositions (tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronenesses [sic]) which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality of his experience.”28 By participating in the religious system, the worshipper appropriates these dispositions through an interaction with the symbols of that religion or culture and begins to “behave” in light of this appropriation. Each person learns ways of interpreting and acting within a world, thus shaping a meaningful universe, through participation in a religion. Religion, and hence culture, is a social

25 Ibid., 91.
26 Ibid., 94.
28 Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural Symbol,” 95.
text to which each person is capable of both performing and understanding if they attend to the symbols of that culture.²⁹

Yet, why is it necessary to create this meaningful world through the use of symbols? Geertz writes, “For those able to embrace them…religious symbols provide a cosmic guarantee not only for their ability to comprehend the world, but also…to give a precision to their feeling, a definition to their emotions which enables them, morosely or joyfully, grimly or cavalierly, to endure it.”³⁰ The human person “needs” religious symbols because these symbols make it possible to both create, as well as inhabit a meaningful universe, one in which there is an order to the inexplicable aspects of human life.³¹ Religion moves the human person beyond the vision offered by a commonsense, scientific, and aesthetic perspective of existence.³² Because of this, religion has to do with the “really real,” the union of metaphysics and a way of life.³³ But, the mere existence of these religious symbols does not necessarily lead to their appropriation by any person within a community.

Here, Geertz suggests that ritual is the universal cultural practice that leads to this appropriation. Ritual is in some sense the preferred pedagogy of religion. He writes, “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one’s sense of reality….”³⁴ Ritual involves the symbols of a religion in performative motion, an

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³⁰ Geertz, 104.
³¹ Ibid., 108.
³² Ibid., 112.
³³ Ibid.
³⁴ Ibid.
enactment that forms each person toward a new way of perceiving the world.\textsuperscript{35} Having appropriated the metaphysical beliefs “carried” in the religious symbols through the performance of the ritual, the person now views the commonsense world with religious eyes.\textsuperscript{36} Religious ritual is that unique cultural performance in which the religious symbol system transmits meaning to persons at the very same time that it enables the appropriation of this meaning.

Therefore, Geertz presumes that human beings have the capacity for ritual engagement insofar as they are human and thus concerned with questions of transcendent meaning. Further, by carrying out this ritual action, each person comes to appropriate the meaning of that religious system. There are two problems with Geertz’ conception of the function of religious ritual, one related to his notion of symbols as carrier of the meaning and the other touching upon the means through which ritual enables appropriation. First, cultural meaning does not reside in any symbol or system of symbols, religious or otherwise.\textsuperscript{37} Rather, meaning is always achieved through the interaction of the cognitive structures of a particular person and a cultural and social world.\textsuperscript{38} As the cognitive anthropologist Bradd Shore writes:

\begin{quote}
Cultural meaning construction is a specific kind of assimilation, requiring two distinct cognitive processes. First, a conventional form of a cognitive model is derived from instituted models present in the social environment. Second, a novel experience is organized for an individual in relation to the conventional cognitive model, providing a significant degree of sharing in the way individuals within a community experience the world. Cultural cognition is a special kind of meaning-seeking activity closely related to more general processes of meaning construction.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Shore’s claim requires elaboration, touching upon some of the concerns in the field of cognitive anthropology. Included among these concerns are the means by which cultural

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{38} Shore, \textit{Culture in Mind}, 319.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
meaning is transmitted from generation to generation, as well as how a specific culture shapes interpersonal thoughts, feelings, and motivations.\textsuperscript{40} One theory that has become prominent among cognitive anthropologists is that of cultural models. By cultural models, anthropologists mean culturally formed cognitive schemas that “are learned, internalized patterns of thought-feeling that mediate both the interpretation of on-going experience and the reconstruction of memories.”\textsuperscript{41} In essence, they are the lenses gradually acquired through dwelling within a culture that allow a person to make sense of new experiences and interpret his or her life as a meaningful narrative within a community.

According to Shore, there are two major types of cultural models, including mental and instituted models.\textsuperscript{42} Mental models are both personal and conventional. Personal mental models are individual ways of making meaning in the world that “are idiosyncratic in that they are not shared in their details by others in my community.”\textsuperscript{43} Prominent among these personal models are mnemonic devices and mental maps. When I think of the city of Boston, forming a sort of mental map of the landscape, I have specific points of reference that are unique to my experience of walking around this city. For the most part, these models are private, and though inevitably shaped by a culture, are peculiar to the person who employs this model. Conventional personal models, on the other hand, are social ways of thinking, acting, behaving, and desiring “that constrain attention and guide what is perceived as salient….”\textsuperscript{44} They are the shared lenses of a culture, which most people have appropriated. The ability of a classroom of teenagers in

\textsuperscript{40} Strauss and Quinn, \textit{A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning}, 8.
\textsuperscript{42} Shore, \textit{Culture in Mind}, 46-52.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
Newton, Massachusetts to agree in their description of the perfect male and female body, without prior discussion, is evidence of the ubiquity of these conventional models.

Related to mental models are instituted models. Shore writes, “Instituted models are social institutions—conventional, patterned public forms such as greetings, calendars, cockfights, discourse genres, houses, public spaces, chants, conventionally body postures, and even deliberately orchestrated aromas.” These public cultural models are the material of a culture, creations that serve as the prime source for developing new mental models, as well as expressing previously appropriated models. Instituted models are found in museums, concert halls, educational curricula, formal and informal etiquette, as well as ritual itself. When a cultural model is no longer congruent with conventional mental models, then this instituted cultural model becomes antiquated or a crisis of meaning ensues. Out of this crisis, new instituted models will inevitably come into existence. In some sense, this process of developing new instituted models is part of the natural development of any culture. One style of architecture gives way to another; educational curricula are changed to reflect the conventional models of the society in which they are developed; new forms of narrative arise that alter the genre of the novel. Inevitably, each of these cultural developments (or regressions, depending upon one’s perspective) is a source of conflict within a society. Yet, it is also the very opportunity for learning.

A cultural model, therefore, may consist of narrative structures, verbal formulas, tropes and metaphors, images of interpersonal space, conceptions of time and social relationships, intellectual and theoretical theories of the world, and scripted ways of behaving. All of these models may exist in instituted ways through the material of any culture, as well as within the

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45 Ibid., 51.
46 Ibid.
mind of each person within that culture through a multiplicity of personal models that enable a person to make meaning within a universe.\textsuperscript{47} And further, each person within a culture is always making sense of these cultural models in light of new experiences. Cultural models do not communicate meaning directly but will elicit (or not, as the case may be) memories, thoughts, desires, and motivations that are part of a larger repertoire of previously appropriated cultural models, both personal and conventional.\textsuperscript{48} The production of meaning is “an active construction by an intentional, sentient, and creative mind…between the conventional forms of cultural life and their inner representations in consciousness.”\textsuperscript{49} Human beings are trying to make sense of the outside material of a culture, including ritual, through what is inside, the mind. Meaning occurs through this interaction.\textsuperscript{50}

What does this have to do with ritual action? Simply, ritual, a kind of cultural performance, does not communicate meaning directly. Rather, it elicits memories, thoughts, desires, and motivations that have already been formed by a wider universe of learned cultural models shaped by human experience. A person, whether familiar with the cultural models required for any ritual performance or not, will interpret this performance through already appropriated cultural models. In fact, the efficacy and fruitfulness of ritual engagement within the official rite of the “religion” requires that one is at least familiar with the cultural models of which any particular ritual presumes. Cultural meaning, achieved through ritual action, is a result of a process of perceiving, thinking, analogizing, and appropriating the cultural models

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 56-67.
\textsuperscript{49} Shore, 372.
\textsuperscript{50} For a description of how this capacity for meaning making occurs developmentally, see Robert Kegan, \textit{In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
implicit within a ritual action into a broader outlook upon life. Ritual, and its use of symbol (no matter how powerful these symbols may be), communicates meaning indirectly.  

Few ritual activities, within Catholicism, are more exemplary of this complicated process of meaning making through cultural models than the rite of infant baptism. The rite of infant baptism is an instituted model, expressing certain theological and cultural claims of Catholicism regarding this sacrament and life as a Christian. The preferred place and time of baptism is within the Easter Vigil or Sunday Eucharistic liturgy so as to express the Paschal quality of the sacrament. The theological imagery surrounding infant baptism within the rite is becoming a child of God, being enlightened, as well as washing away the effects of original sin. The responsibility for the developing faith of the infant is placed in the hands of the parents and godparents, and to some extent the gathered assembly. Yet, as any pastoral minister is aware,

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54 The prayers of exorcism before baptism for children state, “Almighty and ever-living God, you sent your only Son into the world to cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil, to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness, and bring him into the splendor of your kingdom of light. We pray for these children: set them free from original sin, make them temples of your glory, and send your Holy Spirit to dwell within them. We ask this through Christ our Lord” (no. 49).
55 Ibid., no. 56.
the cultural meaning communicated through the instituted model of the rite of baptism is not necessarily the same act of meaning created by its participants. Mental and conventional models are also operative. The presider of the sacrament may choose one series of prayers within the rite over another, emphasizing a certain theological aspect of baptism that appeals to the presider’s mental model of the sacrament. The couple baptizing their child may miss this subtle theological point performed by the priest or deacon, instead conceiving of baptism as a formal acknowledgement of new life, a rite of passage performed by the Church, but ultimately about family and tradition. One pair of grandparents may express gratitude that their grandchild has been rescued from the flames of hell, while the other pair may see some sadness upon this occasion, since their once Jewish daughter, has now promised to raise her child within the faith of the Catholic church. The assembly itself will have a similar range of meaning, from a sense of paschal joy at seeing new members entering into its community, to boredom and annoyance that yet another interruption to their hearing of Mass has occurred. If the ministers within the Church desire a fruitful reception of the sacrament on the part of the infant, one that involves both understanding of the official theology of the rite by the parents and godparents, as well as a way of life that has become baptismal within the family and the assembly, they will need to be cognizant of the official theology of the rite; the presumed dispositions that are necessary for fruitful reception and participation within the sacrament by the various parties; and, the already acquired cognitive and motivating dispositions that act as lens through which the official meaning of the sacrament rite must pass. Meaning is occurring through an interaction among these various dispositions within each person involved in the sacramental ritual.
Second, religious ritual, while acting as a complex place for meaning making, is not necessarily the privileged practice for mediating the appropriation of any particular “beliefs.”

Talal Asad, an anthropologist influenced by Michel Foucault’s technologies of the self, writes:

Mustn’t the ability and the will to adopt a religious standpoint be present prior to the ritual performance? That is why precisely a simple stimulus-response model of how ritual works will not do. And if that is the case, then ritual in the sense of a sacred performance cannot be the place where religious faith is attained, but the manner in which it is (literally) played out. If we are to understand how this happens, we must examine not only the sacred performance itself but also the entire range of available disciplinary practices, within which dispositions are formed and sustained and through which the possibilities of attaining the truth are marked out.56

What are the assumptions undergirding Asad’s claim? Asad is wary of any approach to ritual that conceives of it as a cultural performance of meaningful symbols requiring decoding by the anthropologist.57 This interpretation of ritual is in fact inherently modern, transforming ritual action into textual analysis.58 To counteract this fallacy of modern anthropology, Asad suggests:

Ritual is therefore directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed, something that depends on intellectual and practical disciplines but does not itself require decoding. In other words, apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills.59

Asad unfolds this claim through an analysis of discipline and humility in Christian monasticism. By participating in certain disciplinary practices, including liturgical prayer, the monks “aimed to construct and reorganize distinctive emotions—desire (cupiditas/caritas), humility (humilitas), remorse (contritio)—on which the central Christian virtue of obedience to

57 Ibid., 131, 77.
58 Ibid., 57-58.
59 Ibid., 62.
Ritual prayer, the material object of analysis for most modern anthropologists, is simply one means among many that this monastic self is created and formed. These practices are formative of a person’s identity if they lead to the physical and linguistic capacities necessary for someone who is “such” a person, in this case a medieval monk who desires in this way, who is humble in this way, who feels this type of remorse, who is obedient. It is this particularity that becomes important in judging the efficacy of ritual prayer; if the ritual leads to such dispositions that culminate in a specific identity then it is both efficacious and fruitful. Yet, this formation is shared among a variety of monastic practices, including memorization of the psalms, the study of the liberal arts, and theology itself.

Therefore, in contradiction to Geertz, ritual performance is not ultimately about the appropriation of metaphysical “beliefs” or dispositions, even if an important aspect of ritual performance may in fact be the shaping of belief and desire. Instead, the ritual agent engages in ritual action committed to beliefs, many metaphysical (the nature of God and the means of divine-human communication); the telos to which it is directed (the formation of a monastic self or a baptized Christian, with concomitant responsibilities); and the capacities and dispositions required to become the type of person toward which the ritual forms (the ability to praise God or to practice fasting). In the process, these beliefs and desires are gradually shaped and reformed according to the script of the ritual carried out. Religious ritual is a guide for carrying out this project of “becoming” the end toward which the ritual is directed through a union of memory, thought, and desire.

60 Ibid., 134.
61 Mitchell, 71-72.
Hence, Geertz’s model of ritual as symbol presumes too much regarding ritual’s unique function as a communicator of symbolic meaning and its privileged role in serving as a media for the appropriation of the beliefs of a culture. Yet, through analyzing its deficiencies, it is possible to come to a greater understanding of what makes Christian ritual effective or fruitful. In order for ritual to function formatively, leading to a deepening of Christian faith, it requires an eventual appropriation of the dispositions that undergird the ritual performance. It is not that Christian ritual is devoid of meaningful symbols that communicate saving knowledge. A Eucharistic liturgy featuring incense, postures of adoration among the community, and hymns praising the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood testify to the potentially high Eucharistic theology held by those engaging in the sacrament. But, this is not the purpose of this liturgy—to bear witness to a Eucharistic theology. Rather, it is to transform the community of Christians to become Eucharistic, a process that will undoubtedly involve the complex interaction of the

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63 I note here an important departure from Mitchell’s own evaluation of ritual, particularly as laid out in his *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). For Mitchell, the telos of Christian liturgy is a meeting between God and the human person, not the production of meaning. He writes, “Meaning, after all, is filtered, processed through human intelligence and reason that shape and massage our messages even as we transmit them. But real meetings are not “planned events” filtered first through reason; they are eruptions, raw and unscripted. The sheer suddenness of meeting exposes us (as it exposed Jesus on the cross) to the peril of a radical Otherness” (62). Mitchell fails to recognize in his distinction that every meeting between persons is always filtered through a previously appropriated meaning. Even Mitchell’s description of ritual as eruption and radical Otherness requires a familiarity with postmodern and post-structuralist philosophy and literary theory. Thus, by arguing that ritual is not about the communication of meaning, I am not saying that it is meaningless. Instead, within Christianity, liturgical prayer is the practice through which a person pursues the teleological goal of union with Christ through the celebration of the Paschal mystery. To engage fruitfully in it will require some desire for Christological union, as well as some recognition of the importance of the Paschal Mystery. See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1067-1068.

64 *Sacrosanctum Concilium* states, “At the last supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the church, a memorial of his death and resurrection, a sacrament of love, a sign
signs of that liturgy with human memory, understanding, and desire. Liturgical prayer, within the Eucharistic context, is a script that develops the physical and linguistic skills for remembering, understanding, and desiring as a Eucharistic being. And this requires the acquisition of a certain way of engaging in worship itself that needs to be taught through theological and spiritual formation. The minds of the Christian need to be attuned to the voices through acquiring specific dispositions, developing an unconscious competence in the art of liturgical prayer. Catechetical and theological formation is essential to fruitful liturgical practice.

**IMPLICATIONS**

What are the implications for liturgical catechesis of Taylor’s account of secularity, as well as this entrée into a slice of ritual theory? First, if ritual prayer requires certain cognitive and motivating dispositions in order to be performed fruitfully, and if secularity is its own lens of viewing reality, then the end toward which liturgical catechesis is directed within the present context is the replacement of one series of cognitive and motivating dispositions with another.

Using the example of the *Exsultet* set forth at the beginning of this chapter, one cannot simply of unity, a bond of charity, “a paschal banquet in which Christ is received, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.” The church, therefore, spares no effort in trying to ensure that, when present at this mystery of faith, Christian believers should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, having a good grasp of it through the rites and prayers, they should take part in the sacred action, actively, fully aware, and devoutly. They should be formed by God’s word, and be nourished at the table of the Lord’s Body. They should give thanks to God. Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves. Through Christ, the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and each other, so that final God may be all in all.” In *Vatican Council II: Constitutes, Decrees, Declarations*, trans. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), nos. 47-48.

65 Ibid., no. 11.
tell the Christian about the *anamnetic* quality of the liturgical poem and expect the *ecclesia* to be able to make the exegetical and theological jumps required of the *anamnetic* grammar of the poem. Instead, it becomes necessary to teach the theology of this poem. The Scriptural images employed by this masterful piece of liturgical poetry. The paschal mystery presented through the words and actions of this aspect of the Easter Vigil. A Christology, which sees Christ as the Word made flesh, the *logos* at work in the great deeds of redemption performed in Israel. The eschatological orientation presumed within the prayer. One must be familiar with the signs, and gradually come to see the world through these signs, in order to perform this prayer fruitfully. This further means that the theological education pursued in understanding these signs cannot be a matter of providing content alone. The theological grammar of the liturgical poem has to be presented as a kind of a spiritual beholding of the mysteries. In some sense, in order for liturgical prayer to be fruitful in the present context, we need a renewed kerygmatic movement, one that sees theological knowledge and education in a way not unlike that Josef Jungmann: “To the degree that we grasp things with true understanding, will they influence us, particularly when we see them in their totality, that is, in their bearing on all our activity and striving. And it precisely on this basis that a vital understanding and total-view of religion, which can give a cosmic grasp of reality, is of decisive significance.” A liturgical catechism may assist in this endeavor.

Second, in light of the renewed understanding of secularity in Taylor’s work, perhaps it may be time to conceive of new approaches to religious education for Catholic faith (methods that include the theological and spiritual formation requisite for fruitful liturgical prayer). An example will help. Catholic religious education in the last several decades has been

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characterized by the appropriation of faith through a dialogue between what the *General Directory for Catechesis* calls profound human experience and revelation. But how? One way, well-known within the guild of religious education, is the shared Christian praxis approach by Thomas Groome. Commenting upon this approach in the context of divine pedagogy, Groome writes:

The ideal context of this approach is a community of conversation and active participation by all in sharing faith together. It typically unfolds as a process of bringing life to faith and bringing faith to life. It invites people to look at and reflect on their lives together, to bring this praxis to encounter, to reflect upon and to learn the wisdom of Christian story, and then to make this faith their own, appropriating and choosing to live it as faith alive in the world.

Elsewhere, regarding the relationship between faith and life, Groome writes:

[Movement 4 activity also reflects the conviction that in the encounter between their own stories/visions, and a Story/Vision of Christian faith, participants have a “natural” capacity to see the revelatory correlation between the two courses. The revelatory dynamic of movement 4 arises from a basis aptitude or affinity people have to move constantly back and forth between recognizing the truth of God’s self-disclosure in their own lives and the resonant truth in “the faith handed on.”]

Yet, is this not what secularization in fact makes difficult—the very recognition of divine mediation in human experience? And does not such recognition require certain assumptions about reality that cannot presumed in the student? Still, what is not needed is a turning away from the category of experience in catechesis, moving toward the “parrot model,” one that I have heard used often in critiques against Groome’s approach. The child has to become a parrot in order to appropriate Christian faith as a way of counteracting secularism. This is naïve and a

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67 *General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 153c.
failure to recognize Groome’s important pedagogical insights and contributions to religious education in the last several decades.

Another option for discerning models for religious education is ancient and medieval Scriptural exegesis and theology. While this essay does not allow for an in-depth discussion of such approaches, I can at least sketch why such an approach might be valuable, particularly for liturgical prayer. As Jean LeClercq comments in his classic, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*:

> A certain experience of the realities of faith, a certain ‘lived faith,’ is at one and the same time the condition for and the result of monastic theology. The word ‘experience,’…should not, in this context, imply anything esoteric. It simply means that, in study and in reflection, importance was granted to the inner illumination of which Origen and Gregory spoke so often, to that grace of intimate prayer, that affectus as it is called by St. Benedict, that manner of savoring and relishing the Divine realities which is constantly taught in the patristic tradition…It is a biblical experience inseparable from liturgical experience. It is experiencing the Church, an experience undergone in medio Ecclesiae, since it is nourished by the texts inherited from tradition.\(^70\)

This renewed approach to religious education does not leave experience behind but rather calls forth the Christian to experience the beauty of the faith life in all of its facets, including prayer and study. Imagine a catechetical introduction to the Eucharist, which did not begin with human experience of meal eating, but instead involved a weekend long retreat—one that included prayer, talks about the theology of the Eucharist that were inspired by patristic and medieval exegesis (and given by those who had mastered this way of speaking), and frequent prayer. Such an experience might introduce Christian to the dispositions requisite for liturgical prayer, teaching divine mediation in the process. The catechetical sessions following this retreat would maintain a similar structure and explore these themes deeper through study of texts and prayer, guided by the educator.

Of course, catechesis is not the only ministry that needs to focus upon the effect of worship in a secular age. Within Catholicism, one may rightly be concerned with the quality of signs in liturgy itself. The Vigil, and the singing of the *Exsultet*, is ripe for full participation because of its use of candles, beautiful poetic song, the contrast of light and darkness, incense, and its context in the Triduum. Yet, much of liturgical prayer today within parishes does not witness to the remarkable mysteries of Christian faith to which the signs refer. Thus, a final concern within both liturgical prayer and catechesis is a concentration upon liturgical aesthetics. How a use of beautiful iconography, incense, the simplicity of chant, the homily, Eucharistic adoration, hymnody, becomes a “significant” sign—capable of referring to God.

In conclusion, based upon the current context of secularity—as described by Taylor—and an understanding of ritual, which does not automatically incorporate one within the truths of a particular culture, it is up to a renewed liturgical catechesis to educate for fruitful participation in liturgical prayer. This fruitful participation will explore the essential cognitive and motivating dispositions necessary for that prayer. It will also employ a method inspired by the type of theology performed by the patristic and medieval Church, one that never separated knowledge of revelation and love. Finally, this renewed approach to liturgical catechesis requires attention to the truth and beauty of liturgical signs. The hope is that the renewal of liturgical catechesis in this way might lead to the forgotten way of doing things, mentioned by Romano Guardini.