The Liturgical Theology of Aidan Kavanagh, OSB: Synthesis and Critique

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THE LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF AIDAN KAVANAGH, OSB:
SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
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December 2011
THE LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF AIDAN KAVANAGH, OSB:
SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

THE LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF AIDAN KAVANAGH, OSB:
SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE

By
Michelle Gilgannon

December 2011

Dissertation supervised by Professor George Worgul, Ph.D.

This dissertation explores the liturgical theology of the late Aidan Kavanagh, OSB. His particular approach to liturgy helped to shape the implementation of the liturgical changes instituted by the Second Vatican Council. His early published works were instrumental in explaining the goals of these liturgical changes, while his later works offered a not-so-subtle critique of how the changes had begun to impact the American Church. Fr. Kavanagh based the importance of liturgy on several unique and potentially controversial subjects. To Fr. Kavanagh, liturgical theology is theologia prima and the foundation of all other secondary theology. Participation in the liturgy and theologia prima is afforded to all those initiated into the Church. For this reason, he focused much of his scholarship on the rites of initiation and proposed that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was the norm of baptism. His passionate and provocative approach to liturgy may still have relevance as the Church embraces continued liturgical
revision. The first chapter is an exploration of his personal and intellectual background. It reviews many of his early articles and notes how his tone shifts from one of explanation to one of critique. The next chapter seeks to define the key elements liturgy, ecclesiology, sacrament and ritural. The next chapter attempts to unpack his liturgical theology. Theologia prima, the maxim lex orandi…lex credendi and the issues of liturgy in regards to culture are explored. This chapter also begins to highlight Fr. Kavanagh’s appreciation of the Eastern approach to liturgy and his reliance on the work of Alexander Schmemann. The next chapter explores his theology of initiation and its importance to liturgical celebration. The final chapter is a brief synthesis and critique of both his theology and its continued relevance. The critique comes from the author, other theologians who engaged his thought during his lifetime and from contemporary issues in liturgical theology. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology evidences limitations with regards to subjects like ecumenism, diversity and post modernity. However, his theology still has relevance today because of the passion he brought to liturgy and his vision for corporate worship constituting the Church.
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INTRODUCTION

Thesis

The title of this dissertation is, *The Liturgical Theology of Aidan Kavanagh, OSB: Synthesis and Critique*. This topic was chosen because of the unique style and contributions that the late Aidan Kavanagh made to liturgical theology. In researching his writings in preparation for proposing this topic, it was noted that no one had ever studied his primary works in great detail. Other works had either focused on individual aspects of his theology, or had compared a few of his main liturgical concepts to the work of other liturgical theologians, but there had been no presentation of his complete corpus.

To do justice to Fr. Kavanagh’s theology, a strategic choice in method had to be made. Would this work be primarily biographical? Would it be expository? Again, as no one had ever presented his full theology the decision was made to make this dissertation an exposition of his work that included biographical details to put his theology into context. Hence, the exact nature of the thesis is the reading and explanation of his work in liturgy.

This endeavor has merit because Fr. Kavanagh made important contributions to liturgical theology, particularly in the reception of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II.¹ A note from a *Festschrift* written in his honor refers to Fr. Kavanagh as, “one of the most influential liturgists of the post-conciliar period.”² This sentiment was echoed in the

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¹ Fr. Kavanagh wrote extensively on the major reforms made to the liturgy by the Second Vatican Council. The revision of the liturgical text that is currently being implemented in the Church was obviously not something considered by Fr. Kavanagh. In the final chapter the author will attempt a dialogue between Fr. Kavanagh’s theology and the current revision.

memorials written for his funeral. His writings produced debate and dissent, and filled many of his students with a passion to understand the liturgy as he understood it.

At the same time, the research into his theology uncovered limitations in his work. Specifically, Fr. Kavanagh’s theology lacks a systematic methodology. It appears that Fr. Kavanagh was less a systematic theologian than a strictly liturgical theologian. It seems that he purposefully limited his focus, and his influence in liturgy mentioned above can be understood as being a practical theology. Unlike many liturgical scholars, Fr. Kavanagh focused on the ritual of liturgy and the rites of initiation rather than the Eucharist. This narrow focus might be attributed to his own adult conversion experience.

Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is also limited by his historical understanding. Fr. Kavanagh took a historical approach to liturgy and was committed to studying and presenting the liturgy and the sacraments of initiation through the lens of history. The question brought to his theology is whether his historical approach was always accurate. His historical bias also created limits in his ability to approach the cultural context of liturgy. While he was aware of the ways culture influenced the early Church, he was unwilling to apply different cultural contexts to the contemporary liturgy.

The author has also noticed that Fr. Kavanagh’s theology influenced the style of the dissertation itself. The early chapters of the dissertation, those that chronicle his life and publications and those that present his core concepts, are more descriptive than synthetic. The purpose of this is to be faithful to Fr. Kavanagh’s own style of writing, and theology. One of the compelling aspects of Fr. Kavanagh’s work is his descriptive

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writing style. The analytical elements of this dissertation are found primarily in the last chapter of the dissertation. This chapter is both a brief synthesis and a critique of his theology, and attempts to show the limitations mentioned above in greater detail.

This exercise has yielded other important issues that are not addressed in this dissertation but should be taken up in future research. For example, how would Fr. Kavanagh’s theology compare to liturgical theologies that focus on language? Are there insights his theology can bring to the behavioral focus on liturgy or to the cultural focus? Again, these topics are not addressed in this dissertation, but future work might suggest a shift in titles to bring his complete theology into dialogue and comparison with other theologies of the liturgy.

This introduction will show that the author focused on Fr. Kavanagh’s background, his main liturgical concepts and their lasting impact before engaging in a critique of his theology from several perspectives. Fr. Kavanagh’s writings bespeak of a man who is deeply passionate about Christian worship. This dissertation attempts to keep that passionate bias in mind as it explores the both the gifts and limitations of his liturgical theology.

**Preliminary Reflection on the Liturgy**

The importance of the liturgy of the Catholic Church, the “source and summit” of both Christian life and the activity of the Church, cannot be over-stated. It effects the redemption of those who participate, and enables the faithful to preach the truth of Christ as it is expressed in the liturgy. The liturgy is both God’s offer of love and forgiveness to us through Christ and our response in worship to that continual offering. The liturgy is also an important area of theological investigation, dedicated to exploring the ‘why’ of
sacred liturgical action. One type of theological investigation also works to ensure that liturgical action, the words we say and rituals we perform, are adequately informed by the beliefs we express through theological reflection. There is another perspective, another type of liturgical theology that explores liturgy from the inside by observing how our rituals create the beliefs that we express in creeds. For those who are more comfortable observing liturgy from the first perspective, the outside, the second, inside perspective can be an uncomfortable but important balance to understanding liturgical action.

Given its central role in the life of the Church, the liturgy was and is the subject of continual explanation and refinement. This spirit of refinement continues as we work to implement the liturgy envisioned by the Second Vatican Council. In the book, The Awakening Church, several notable theologians and professors of religious studies give their assessment of the state of these liturgical changes twenty-five years after Sacrosanctum concilium. The final paper summarizes the findings and the impressions of the other participants as generally hopeful for the future of the liturgy. “A formula for our future work is offered here: the liturgical life of the community, together with whatever experimentation that entails, must be the subject of critical analysis in an atmosphere of mutual encouragement.” Implementing the liturgy envisioned by the Council will always require the ability to accept changes as the Church better grasps the intention of its teaching.

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5 Lawrence J. Madden, S.J., ed., The Awakening Church: 25 Years of Liturgical Renewal, (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 1. This book is a collection of papers given at a colloquium held at Georgetown University. The presenters were each given the task of commenting on a collaborative study conducted by The Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, Georgetown Center for Liturgy, Spirituality, and the Arts, The Loyola Pastoral Institute, and Corpus Christi Center. The study visited fifteen parishes in the English-speaking American Church, and documented reactions to the changes in liturgy. For more information on the study, please see the introductory section of this book.

While Fr. Kavanagh supported the reforms of Vatican II and disagreed with detractors who wished to restore the Tridentine liturgy, he reminded us that not all teachings from the council should be taken with equal seriousness. In *Elements of Rite*, he points out that paragraph 34 of *Sacrosanctum concilium* calls for the liturgy to be simple and resist useless repetitions. He notes, “human rituals are rarely short, clear and without repetition. They are often long, richly ambiguous, and vastly repetitive.” His ability to both embrace and critique the Council comes from his deeply held respect and awe for the sacramental aspect of faith. One can say that this sacramental perspective was fed through participation in the liturgy, but Fr. Kavanagh also wisely points out that there is something within human beings that responds sacramentally to the world and to God. Our sacramental perspective also gives rise to liturgy as we respond to the actions God has taken in our world.

Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of, and respect for, the very human element of liturgy is an important reminder to those of us who look at liturgy through the lens of theology. Liturgy is more than expressing correct theology. There is an organic element, a “doing” of liturgy that must not be forgotten. The liturgy is active, both on God’s part and on our own part, and the meanings of those actions require an attitude of worshipful respect. Fr. Kavanagh was very aware of the impact of culture on liturgy and the way in which non-religious rituals impacted the ritual of liturgy. This is one reason why his work pays so much attention to the interplay between church and world, and the

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8 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 23-24. In this section, Kavanagh notes that even though modern science may view the world as an object, historically human religious systems have approached the world as a “subject of what personality, divine and human, would make of it.” Subjectivity requires a sacramental response.
Christian’s response to the world.\textsuperscript{10} It is also why he writes of the small details of liturgy: the importance of gestures and liturgical spaces, the placement of altars and baptismal fonts, and the attitudes of all involved. The small details highlight the larger meanings behind rituals and can be a help or a hindrance to how we participate in liturgy.\textsuperscript{11} Fr. Kavanagh describes his approach to liturgy as being strongly influenced by the Eastern traditions as they tend more open to the “doing” of liturgy; that is, less teaching focused, and more open to movement and contemplation.\textsuperscript{12}

Fr. Kavanagh’s Eastern influence, his attention to the practical, physical details of liturgy, and his focus on the human element is an example of the second, inside, perspective of liturgical theology. This type of liturgical theology questions the assumption that there is an outside theology that informs liturgy. Liturgy changes the very people who participate in it, and this change will affect the next liturgical act. It is this inside perspective on the role of liturgy as that which founds all theology that will be explored in length in this dissertation.

\textbf{Content of the Dissertation}

In order to better understand Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical perspective, and explore its potential limitations, it is necessary to begin by exploring Fr. Kavanagh the person, his background and intellectual history. Chapter one will illuminate the little that is known of his early life, his conversion from Southern Baptist, to Episcopalian, and finally his adult conversion to Roman Catholicism. While reasons for his conversion are not

\textsuperscript{10} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, chapter 2. Kavanagh makes the case for the connection between creation and redemption and the Christian’s role within the world.

\textsuperscript{11} This thought is also supported in \textit{Sacramentum caritatis}, paragraph 40, emphasis on giving due attentiveness to the importance of all liturgical language such as gestures and silence, vestments and colors.

\textsuperscript{12} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 4.
documented anywhere, and he chose to keep his early life very private, his conversion experience is important not only to understand his liturgical theology, but also his views on Christian initiation. This chapter will also trace Fr. Kavanagh’s academic career, and his move from St. Meinrad to Notre Dame, and finally to Yale Divinity School. A review of his written works during these times will show the development of his thought and allow a better understanding of his mature work in On Liturgical Theology. The importance of his conversion history is again apparent in his later works dealing with confirmation. The issue of the process of initiation is central to his understanding of liturgy.

Chapter two will act as the preparation for delving into his mature liturgical theology. The focus will be on meanings and definitions. When Fr. Kavanagh writes of liturgy and sacrament, of ecclesiology and ritual, he writes from a particular perspective. This chapter will attempt to define his meanings so that the following chapter can be devoted to unpacking his liturgical theology. As mentioned above, Fr. Kavanagh’s definition of ritual includes both the religious and the non-religious. We engage in religious ritual because ritual is innate to human beings. Hence, Fr. Kavanagh respects the difficult necessity of analyzing religious ritual from within the ritual itself. Both chapter two and three will also highlight some of the Eastern theologians who influenced Fr. Kavanagh’s work. Particular focus will be paid to some of the works of Robert Taft and Alexander Schmemann.

Chapter three will explore his primary concepts in action. It will start by noting the connection between ecclesiology and liturgy. If liturgy is theologia prima then each

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13 Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007, “Fr. Aidan…never talked about his early life…”
member who participates is a theologian responsible for shaping the liturgy itself. Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence in liturgy as foundational theology will be explored in some detail, as well as its implications and connection to culture. Central to his assertion of liturgy as theologia prima is his take on the maxim lex orandi, lex credendi. The primacy of liturgical action and the relation between lex orandi and lex credendi is also treated in Sacramentum caritatis and this chapter will attempt a dialogue between the two definitions.

Chapter four will begin by articulating Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of initiation. This is not just an unrelated issue to his liturgical theology, as participation in the liturgy is that which is afforded to those initiated into the Church. His own experience of adult conversion dramatically shaped his approach to initiation. Again, the Eastern influence is quite clear and while he is writing on the Roman Rite he points out that “there remains a rich variety of initiatory practices in historic Christianity east and west.”

14 This chapter will conclude with Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective on confirmation.

The final chapter will be a more complete critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s work. The above remarks do not do full justice to the passion, and persuasiveness of Fr. Kavanagh’s own work. One of the positives to be taken from Fr. Kavanagh’s deeply felt and spiritual approach to liturgy is that theologians should allow themselves to be shaped by worship. However, despite the importance of his perspective, and the wry humor infused in his writings, it is not difficult to recognize several limitations in his theology. It has already been noted that his theology cannot be considered systematic because of his self-imposed limitations, and his limitations in methodology and historical understanding. Also the

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tone of his work became more and more critical over time. This has led the author to surmise that his focus on the history of liturgy had the effect of calcifying his view and rendering him unable to engage in contemporary liturgical issues without longing for the liturgy of the past. The final section of this dissertation focuses on brief synthesis and critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology through the voices of those theologians who directly engaged him, the author’s own experience of liturgy and the work of contemporary theologians taking on issues of postmodernity and culture.

The first critique is of his take on textualization. The notion of detextualizing the western church is overly-idealistic. While Fr. Kavanagh does not propose to fully detextualize the western liturgy, the cure he proposes, the reintroduction of ritual, is offered without thorough examples of how this might be accomplished in religions devoted to the text.

A second criticism that can be brought to his theology is asked as, “What is the goal of the liturgy?” One can glean that Fr. Kavanagh’s theology views liturgy as a goal in itself. Theologians such as Marjorie Procter-Smith and Geoffrey Wainwright wonder why Fr. Kavanagh’s theology never touches on the action of Christians outside of the liturgy.15 Fr. Kavanagh talks much about the relationship between the Church and the World, but he stops short of connecting how liturgy should influence the faithful in their daily existence.

The next area of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology that is critiqued is his approach to theology as theologia prima and his understanding of lex orandi…lex credendi. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology makes the relationship between the two laws a one way street. This is especially problematic for the way theology is currently practiced. The distinctions

15 Both Marjorie Procter-Smith and Geoffrey Wainwright make this criticism of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology.
made between different theologies, systematics, dogmatics, moral, liturgical and pastoral, make it hard to accept that doctrine does not govern and guide worship, or at least influence it to some degree. The critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of initiation includes theologians such as Lambert Leijssen and Paul Turner. Both attempt to open dialogue and critique on his hypothesis on confirmation because his approach to confirmation is unique and novel.

The final area of critique addresses the questions of postmodern theology that have come to the forefront since the time of Fr. Kavanagh’s scholarship. While Fr. Kavanagh was certainly not a postmodern thinker and did not address the issues of postmodernity, the subject of liturgy lends itself to some of the concerns of postmodernity. Questions of God’s presence and mode in which it is communicated are areas of concern for both liturgical and postmodern theology. As noted by David Power, “One can hardly address any field of human enterprise and knowledge today…without taking the debates about the post[-]modern into account.”16 Fr. Kavanagh’s theology was a theology of presence, and while he used the concept of icon to explain that the Church’s liturgy was guided through the inverted perspective of the Gospel, he never addressed the issues of God’s absence or our tendency to make idols out of our symbols.

Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is also very limited in exploring the contemporary issues of ecumenism and cultural difference in the liturgy. While his historical studies made it clear that the liturgy of the ancient Church supported multiple expressions based on culture, he seemed unwilling to apply this reality to either American culture, or to non-Western liturgical practices. The fact that he was largely silent on issues of liberation

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theology, justice and contemporary liturgical enculturation, all issues that were being discussed during the time of his scholarship, points to a large gap in his theology and is a confirmation that he did not take a systematic approach to the liturgy.

The final chapter will conclude with areas of future research towards which the exposition of his work points. Now that the task of reading and explaining Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is complete, the author might be able to take this unique, albeit somewhat limited, theology and put it into conversation with other liturgical theologians. As mentioned above, most works that use Fr. Kavanagh’s theology do so with only limited focus on a few of his main concepts. Situating Fr. Kavanagh’s full theology within the larger scope of liturgical and sacramental theology may help to better understand both his gifts and limitations. Fr. Kavanagh’s devotion to history might also make it fruitful to compare him to other theologians who explore the history of the liturgy.

Despite all of the limitations explored in the final chapter it is the opinion of the author that Fr. Kavanagh’s theology has continued relevance for both academic study and for practical issues of assisting the Church in adjusting to refinements and changes in liturgical practice. Undertaking this study has been both theologically and personally profitable. The opportunity to consciously view the liturgy from the ‘inside’ is not one that often happens. Understanding the role of worship and participation on both an intellectual and practical level does influence one’s own approach to liturgical celebration.
CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Fr. Kavanagh’s Biological and Family History

To know a person’s thinking or to understand what a person has written or taught, it is helpful to know their personal context or history. While there is actually very little known about Aidan Kavanagh’s early life, it is important to flesh out these details to form some tentative hypotheses as to how Fr. Kavanagh’s early life, and early religious upbringing, may have influenced his liturgical theology. In many ways, the context of Fr. Kavanagh’s life provides the lens through which the exposition of his work can be most easily understood.

Aidan Kavanagh was born Joseph Michael Suttle on April 20, 1929, to Joseph and Guarrel (Mullins) Suttle.¹ He was raised as a Southern Baptist in Waco, Texas.² Very little is known about Fr. Kavanagh’s father and it appears that his mother and father either divorced, or that his mother was widowed, as she went on to marry Joseph Kavanagh.³ It is interesting to note that the various memorial essays written on the occasion of Fr. Kavanagh’s death do not mention this second marriage⁴ and state that Fr. Kavanagh took the last name of his foster father, Joseph Kavanagh. As noted below, Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, a classmate of Fr. Kavanagh, suggests that Mr. Kavanagh was actually Fr. Kavanagh’s step father.

³ Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June, 1 2007. “Mr. Kavanagh was actually his step-father…Fr. Aidan was legally adopted by Mr. Kavanagh when Mr. Kavanagh became Mrs. Kavanagh’s second husband.”
After being born and raised in the Southern Baptist tradition, Fr. Kavanagh converted to the Episcopal Church. He attended The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee from 1947-1949.\(^5\) It was while at The University of the South that Fr. Kavanagh converted to Episcopalian.\(^6\) It is not known whether his adoptive father was also Episcopalian, (perhaps influencing Fr. Kavanagh’s later conversion) or if his experience at the school led to his conversion. According to Fr. Cody, Fr. Kavanagh’s mother was already widowed by her second husband in 1950.\(^7\) The date of Fr. Kavanagh’s adoptive father’s death is not noted in any of the essays written for Fr. Kavanagh’s memorial service. What is known is that Fr. Kavanagh converted to Roman Catholicism when he was 21 years old; not long after his previous conversion to Episcopalian.\(^8\)

Despite Fr. Kavanagh’s privacy about his early life, there are a few accounts of his baptism and confirmation as a young adult. The Roman Catholic Church of the 1950’s did not have a specific rite for baptizing adult converts, and Fr. Kavanagh noted to his colleagues and students a few of the aspects of his reception into the Church. He was baptized by Fr. Cornelius Waldo in Perris, California,\(^9\) after receiving catechism lessons with adolescent Indian children who were preparing for their confirmation.\(^10\) Rita Ferrone shares part of the story of his confirmation in her essay: “The day after his

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\(^7\) Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007.

\(^8\) Cf. John Baldwin, S.J., email message to Michelle Gilgannon, July 9, 2007; and Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006.

\(^9\) Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007.

\(^10\) Cf. John Baldwin, S.J., email message to Michelle Gilgannon, July 9, 2007; and Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006.
baptism, the bishop who confirmed him…gave them communion from the reserved sacrament he had brought with him in his car. ‘It struck me as odd at that time,’ he said.‖ One of the major themes of Fr. Kavanagh’s work is that of conversion and Christian initiation. The events of his baptism and confirmation would have surely influenced his later theology of these rites.

The fact of his conversion is known, as is his entry into the Benedictine monastery of St. Meinrad in 1951. The reason for his conversion from Episcopalian to Roman Catholic is unclear. Fr. Cody offered his understanding of the event of the conversion by noting that, “He was received into the Catholic Church by Fr. Cornelius Waldo, (now dead) then pastor of Perris, CA, in order to support his mother, who was living in the rectory with him. Fr. Aidan and his younger brother were then living with their mother, widowed, in Southern California.” It appears that Fr. Kavanagh’s mother was working for Fr. Waldo and that both Fr. Kavanagh and his younger brother were living with her in the rectory. One could hypothesize that Fr. Kavanagh’s mother had also converted to Catholicism. This may explain why Fr. Cody attributed Fr. Kavanagh’s conversion to ‘supporting his mother’. It is not unusual for families to go through conversion together. Our most powerful religious witnesses are our families.

One could also hypothesize that the experience of living in the rectory with Fr. Waldo prompted Fr. Kavanagh’s conversion. How long Mrs. Kavanagh and her sons lived in the rectory is unknown. As previously noted, Fr. Kavanagh converted first to Episcopalian during his time at The University of the South in Tennessee. It is hard to

11 Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006.
12 Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006; and Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007.
13 Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007.
determine how much time Fr. Kavanagh spent living with his mother from 1947, when he went to university until 1950, when he was baptized a Roman Catholic. Certainly, it can be assumed that something in Fr. Kavanagh’s early life sparked his two religious conversions. As noted previously, there are at least two possible reasons that support Fr. Kavanagh’s original conversion to Episcopalian,\(^\text{14}\) and other possible motivators for his conversion to Roman Catholicism.\(^\text{15}\) While the motivation for this second conversion may never be known, one could imagine that similarity in church structure and liturgy made this conversion less shocking than the first conversion from Southern Baptist. It is also interesting to note that Fr. Kavanagh’s conversion to the Episcopal Church probably included a baptism, and that he may not have received baptism in the Southern Baptist Church of his childhood. Speaking to the practices of adult conversion of the time, Fr. Kavanagh underwent a possible second baptism when he converted to Roman Catholicism. Again, the experience of these two conversions relatively close in time would have influenced his theology of initiation.

It seems that Fr. Kavanagh’s conversion to Roman Catholicism might have also been motivated by his desire to become a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. According to Fr. Cody, Fr. Kavanagh was baptized in 1950 and began his novitiate at St. Meinrad’s as a student for Blue Cloud Abbey in Marvin, South Dakota, in 1951.\(^\text{16}\) In May, 1952, Fr. Kavanagh decided to permanently join the community at St. Meinrad,\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{14}\) Either from his experience at The University of the South, or possibly from the influence of his adoptive foster/step father.
\(^{15}\) Hypotheses that his mother had converted and/or that his experience living with Fr. Waldo in the rectory influenced his conversion.
\(^{16}\) Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
and professed his simple vows on August 1, 1952. He was ordained on May 3, 1957. Fr. Kavanagh’s love of and respect for the importance of the liturgy is more than evident in his written work. While he was destined for academic pursuits, one can imagine that this love of liturgy came from his pastoral sense and his sincere desire to share in worship of God with the whole community of the faithful.

Fr. Kavanagh earned his A.B. degree from St. Meinrad in 1957, the same year as his ordination. He next went to the University of Ottawa and earned his S.T.L. in 1958. He had a personal passion for moral theology but was next sent to the University of Trier in Germany to study liturgy. He studied under Balthazar Fischer, who chaired the committee that crafted the reform of Christian initiation. He earned his S.T.D. in 1963. His dissertation, *The Concept of Eucharistic Memorial in the Canon Revisions of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1533-1556*, was originally published by St. Meinrad Abbey Press, but is no longer in print. He returned to St. Meinrad to teach liturgy in the school of theology until he left for a position at Notre Dame in 1966.

Fr. Kavanagh’s academic and intellectual history will be detailed through the rest of this chapter, but in order to complete his personal history it is necessary to skip ahead to his retirement and death.

Fr. Kavanagh retired from Yale Divinity School in 1994, and lived in his home in Hamden, Connecticut, until his death in 2006. Rita Ferrone writes that he cared for his

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19 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
aging mother at his home in Hamden until her death;\(^{23}\) she does not mention the date. Fr. Cody indicated that Fr. Kavanagh’s mother died in 1993.\(^{24}\) Fr. Kavanagh’s death on July 9, 2006, seems to have followed a long illness. While a review of Fr. Kavanagh’s published works shows that he did not engage in many continued academic pursuits after his retirement, he did keep in contact with former students and colleagues. Rita Ferrone relates a phone conversation she had with Fr. Kavanagh in 2001, “He sounded remarkably chipper…We had a good chat on the phone, at the close of which he admonished me cheerfully to ‘Smite the ungodly!’”\(^{25}\) All of the memorials written in his honor mention his importance in liturgical theology, particularly in shaping the implementation of the revised liturgy from the Second Vatican Council. The memorials also speak of a professor with high standards and an unapologetic inability to cope with mediocrity.\(^{26}\)

**Fr. Kavanagh’s Academic Career and Review of Early Liturgical Theology**

Fr. Kavanagh was most certainly a product of his personal history and also his professional history and culture. In the previous section, it was concluded that Fr. Kavanagh’s experience as an adult convert to Roman Catholicism shaped his theology of initiation. While his personal reasons for conversion may never be known, his interpretation of how one should be brought into the Church can be viewed as speaking to a perceived lack in his own baptism and conversion. When writing the *The Shape of

\(^{23}\) Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006.

\(^{24}\) Letter from Fr. Aelred Cody, OSB, member of Kavanagh’s class at St. Meinrad Archabbey, to Michelle Gilgannon June 1, 2007. Fr. Cody also notes that Fr. Kavanagh “avoided his brother (divorced, I think) at their mother’s burial in Arlington, VA in March, 1993.”

\(^{25}\) Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006.

\(^{26}\) Jeannette Cezanne, “Listen to Mrs. Murphy,” *Notre Dame Magazine Online*, [http://www.nd.edu/~ndmag/reflect/cezanne.html](http://www.nd.edu/~ndmag/reflect/cezanne.html), (accessed May 2, 2007). “A stickler for proper communication, Kavanagh was known to give copies of Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* when returning papers, requesting that next time they be ‘written in English’.”
Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Fr. Kavanagh describes the role of the catechumenate as “an ecclesial and liturgical structure within which conversion therapy is carried on.” Conversion therapy is a reoccurring theme in all of Fr. Kavanagh’s work. He often contrasts it to an overly educational attitude that some might take towards Catechumens. Conversion is less about learning the rules of the Church than about assisting people with living as a Christian. This is but one example of how Fr. Kavanagh’s personal history and context shaped his theology. Fr. Kavanagh’s conversion to the Church, ordination as a priest, and graduate work in Germany also happened during a very important time in history for the Roman Catholic Church. The culture of the Church during the time of the Second Vatican Council can perhaps be described as dynamic, and this dynamic culture would also have shaped Fr. Kavanagh’s theology. As a graduate student at the University of Trier, he assisted in research for the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology and written work focuses neatly around a few main themes. First, he writes of the role of the liturgy in relation to theology in general. This is a core theme that is found in his later, more mature works, but which can be seen developing in numerous, early articles. Secondly, unlike many liturgical scholars, Fr. Kavanagh focuses on the rites of initiation rather than the Eucharist. As mentioned previously, this is most likely due to his conversion experience. He may have also focused on these specific rites because of a perceived lack of theological work done on

27 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 128.
28 Rita Ferrone, Memoriam written for service, October 8, 2006. She notes that Fr. Kavanagh studied under Balthazar Fischer who chaired the committee on reforming Christian initiation and that he also worked on communion from the cup.
29 Kavanagh, “Liturgical Theology,” in On Liturgical Theology. This is but one chapter in which Fr. Kavanagh explains liturgy as theologia prima and his insistence that the law of worship is foundational to the law of belief.
the topic. When discussing the various reforms of the council he notes, “It might not be too much to say that Catholic sentiment centered more naturally, so far as looked-for conciliar reforms were concerned, on doing something about the Mass. Catholic research on Eucharistic matters had been far more extensive and of longer duration than research on baptism, and dates back even prior to the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century.”

His focus on the rites of initiation is understandable from both his personal and academic history. It is also important to note that baptism and initiation are necessary requirements for participating in Mass.

Finally, a core theme to Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is the attempt to synthesize the importance of these rites of initiation for the purpose of exploring the worshipful liturgy of the Church. Baptism, confirmation and Eucharist are the continual sources of conversion for catechumens, neophytes and full members of the Body of Christ. Fr. Kavanagh’s synthesis of these rites is informed by an appreciation of the liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox traditions. Fr. Kavanagh often uses Eastern rites and practices as one lens through which to view changes in the Roman Catholic liturgy. Related to this practice is Fr. Kavanagh’s commitment to studying and presenting the liturgy and the sacraments of initiation through the lens of history.

With these contexts in mind, it is now the time to explore the development of Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology and work on initiation through a brief review of his writing in relation to his various professional teaching positions. Fr. Kavanagh taught

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30 Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 102.
31 Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 110. “So radical is baptism that it is not merely something the Church may do in its spare time. In one sense the Church does not precede baptism, baptism precedes the Church.”
32 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 4. When speaking of his biases, “this causes him to be more at home in the iconic East than in the pictorial West…Eastern worship, on the other hand, tends to be less cerebral and more open to movement.”
liturgy at St. Meinrad from 1963 until 1966, when he left to teach at the University of Notre Dame. While at St. Meinrad, *Worship* published a four-part series Fr. Kavanagh wrote on the role of liturgy and service in an effort to unpack the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. This series represents some of his earliest published works and is an appropriate place to begin the exploration of his developing theology. In the first of these articles, “The Liturgy as Service,” Kavanagh proposes that the *Constitution* “presupposes a whole theology of service.”

The act of liturgy itself is the service that began and continues in Christ. This is specifically service of God, began in the Exodus-event of ancient Israel and their covenant with Yahweh. “Through this *people* the mystery of salvation is continually presented in the world through revelation and action.” In the Christ-event, this *people* are distilled to a person, a Servant, and it is from Christ as Servant that the Church as servant receives her call. The most sacred action of the Church, the liturgy, is “her peculiar service in and for the world.”

The theme of the Church in relation to the world is expounded on in great detail in Fr. Kavanagh’s most mature work, *On Liturgical Theology*.

Continuing the theme of service as found in the *Constitution*, Kavanagh’s next article in the series unpacks the notion of sacrament and service. Again, in “Sacrament as an Act of Service,” Kavanagh defends the language of the Constitution when it states, “The liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her power flows.”

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34 Ibid., 7.
35 Ibid., 11.
misunderstanding of this statement is tied to a misunderstanding of sacrament as sign. “(W)hen we are dealing with sacraments we are dealing not merely with sacred but static signs…To suggest that a sacrament is something to be experienced is rather to move beyond the function of a sign and into the dimension of symbol.” Sacraments as symbols are less nouns and more action. Sacraments are active events that link the action of the Church with the action of Christ as perfect sacrament of salvation. It is from these sacred actions that the notion of service arises. “(T)he liturgy is none other than the action of the Church itself, the Church in actu, the very life-process of that living body of Christ which is in the world as servant for the world’s salvation.” The explanation given this statement is founded on Fr. Kavanagh’s overarching theme of the role of liturgy in the life of the Church.

Some theologians may argue that his theology does not deal with the real issues of life lived in the world. As noted above, Fr. Kavanagh taught that the liturgy done properly (the Church “doing” the world) is the source for all service and Christian interaction with the world. In this early article, as in his mature work, Fr. Kavanagh does not attempt to teach Christians how to live, nor does he believe that this is the role of liturgy. A sub-theme in Fr. Kavanagh’s work is that the Church’s role is not to educate Christians, particularly during the liturgy. “[T]he liturgy declaims and proclaims

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39 The theme of sacrament as event is one that remains constant in Kavanagh’s theology.
41 Marjorie Procter-Smith, “Review of On Liturgical Theology, by Aidan Kavanagh, OSB,” Perkins Journal 39:1 (1986). One of her critiques is that Fr. Kavanagh rarely addresses the importance of liturgical action for leading the faithful to living liturgical lives in the world.
42 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 52.
something rather than it analyzes or teaches something.”  The role of the liturgy is to call Christians to constant conversion and the source of their lives and mission.

The third article in the series on service in relation to the liturgy is “The Christian as Servant.”  Kavanagh begins this article with a meditation on baptism and conversion. Baptism is the beginning of a life-long conversion that culminates in last rites. However, this is not isolated to the individual. “His rebirth and renewal by water and spirit affect not only his own person but every point of contact between himself and his community.”

By virtue of their baptism, all Christians are called to continue, in a new way through Christ, the priesthood of Israel. Kavanagh uses the example of Jesus washing the apostles’ feet to link the priestly service of diakonia to all Christians. “Their mission of service (the apostles) is seen in terms of flowing from the Father to the Servant Son, and from him through the apostles into the Church.”

The Christian is assimilated into the person of Christ and continues his service of salvation in the world.

Kavanagh continues the explanation of Christian as servant in the final article in this series and distinguishes the role of the lay priesthood from the ministerial priesthood. In “The Minister as Servant,” Kavanagh frankly addresses the vocations crisis in ways that are still pertinent today. He explains how the layperson really participates in the sacerdotality of the Church through the prophetic nature of marriage and through his/her role in the Eucharist. “There is no liturgical celebration in which each Christian person does not have his own proper ‘liturgy’ to accomplish in the service of the whole.

43 Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 57. This theme is expressed in several additional articles and books.
45 Again, these are themes that are consistent in his writings. His book, *The Shape of Baptism*, extends this meditation into a theology of the baptismal rite.
47 Ibid., 136.
community."  

This is the reasoning behind the Constitution’s charge to revise the liturgical rubrics to include the proper role of the people. All Christians serve the world through their participation in the saving action of liturgy and Eucharist. The ministerial priesthood then serves the whole people of God.

The proper perspective of this role is one who publicly serves the Church. “The minister is the ‘servant of those who serve God’…and under this title he wields the sacerdotality that pervades the body of Christ—not, as it were, over against the rest of the people of God, but for, with, and among them.” Both ministerial and lay priesthood are offices in the Church. The goal of these four articles was to properly define the issue of service in relation to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The role of service in relation to the ministerial priesthood seems to be the most straightforward to explain, and yet deeply bound within the whole framework of the liturgy as service. “The ministerial priesthood’s major function in its service to the Servant People is to preside at the center of the Eucharistic celebration, to catalyze the whole mystery of service in a communicable context of sacred symbols that do not merely convey ideas but cause what they symbolize.” The role of the lay priesthood in relation to the ministerial priesthood is less straightforward, but one of importance to the reforms of the Council. While not a frequent theme in Fr. Kavanagh’s writing, the role of all members of the Church in liturgy is continued in his book on rite.

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50 Kavanagh, “The Minister as Servant,” 221.
51 Ibid., 223. “Both ministerial and lay aspects of the one sacerdotium must each carry out the functions of their office in virtue of the proper charism associated with them.”
52 Ibid., 224.
53 Kavanagh, Elements of Rite, 45, “The liturgical assembly is less a gathering of individuals than a dynamic coordination of orders.”
As seen above, much of Kavanagh’s early publications were devoted to explaining the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. His next series in *Worship* was a two-part elucidation on the Roman Anaphora. His goal was to make a case for the Eucharistic prayer as an ancient example that needed to be better understood and re-worked rather than completely re-written. His first article makes the important historical and theological connection between Christian Eucharistic prayers and Jewish berakoth prayers. Of note is his point that Jewish prayers of benediction are first about admiration and joy in the miraculous events that Yahweh has undertaken for the chosen people.\(^{54}\) Also important to this prayer is that these events are not just in the past, but Yahweh is currently present and active in the people blessing Yahweh’s name.\(^{55}\)

Fr. Kavanagh goes on to explain that this form of berakah was still in active use during the time of Jesus. Jesus’ use of this prayer, as evidenced in the Gospels, is still in the Jewish use except that “he is blessing God in order to proclaim to those present the wondrous good news…not of some past event done by God but *of the present and actual ‘wonder’ of himself and his saving mission*.”\(^{56}\) Two important conclusions come from Kavanagh’s scholarship on this subject. First is that the Christian understanding of Eucharist as ‘thanksgiving’ is a secondary meaning when compared to the Jewish prayer genre from which the Eucharistic prayer comes. Second, theology of the Eucharist has focused too narrowly on the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper without putting them in the proper berakah context of joy and admiration. Eucharist is about the wonder of resurrection, not the night of Jesus’ betrayal. It is not just giving a gift out of gratitude


\(^{55}\) Ibid., 520.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 521 (italics his.).
for a gift given, but standing in ecstatic wonderment at the miracle God continues to work in our midst.

The articles considered above were all published in 1965, and were obviously meant to explain and creatively engage the liturgical reforms brought about by the Second Vatican Council. Kavanagh’s next three articles in *Worship* were published in 1967 and 1969, after he had left St. Meinrad for his position at the University of Notre Dame. Fr. Kavanagh’ tenure at Notre Dame lasted from 1966 until 1973. He rose to the rank of professor of liturgy. These articles are meant to provide opinion and guidance on the implementation of the reforms that had begun after the Council. As such, it is easy to see that Kavanagh strikes a moderate to conservative stand to the way the reforms are actually being manifested. He supports the need for reform, and continues to help interpret the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, while being resistant to novelty and changes to the rite that are not informed by historical-liturgical scholarship.

The first article from this time explores the development of rite. He begins by putting the liturgical crisis into an historical perspective. Essentially, the problems that have created the crisis are the same that contributed to the Reformation and to the liturgical problems addressed by Trent. He then eloquently summarizes the current state of modern society in words that are all the more relevant forty years later. Liturgical rite and worship have not provided a counter influence in a society that continues to dehumanize and isolate individuals. Therefore, it is important to understand the way

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59 Ibid., 336. This is a theme that is continuous in his work. As liturgy as actually practiced is a social event, any liturgical theologian must be sensitive to the way culture influences the people assembled to worship.
the rite develops in order to take into account the influence of culture. Rite does not begin from the ‘top’. It does not change because institutional authority makes changes to it. Rather, liturgical change has three-stages. First, change begins in the worshiping community. “The irreducible base, or genesis point, from which the evolutionary process proceeds, is, of course, the religious community’s awareness of its own actual identity, that is, its consciousness that it is the living contemporary realization of its faith-tradition.”60 This includes the use of the cognitive and linguistic systems of the specific epoch.61 This is one of the early examples of Fr. Kavanagh’s focus on the centrality of the worshiping community to the enterprise of the Church and theology.

The second stage is a response stage, one in which these new systems of thinking and acting are compared to the liturgical tradition. It is the community reacting to itself in the new time and culture, and it can lead to “a thoroughly normal identity crisis.”62 The reactions tend to be conservative and lead the community to re-emphasize elements of the tradition. Finally, the third stage is when the authority structure enters to help with the identity crisis. “(T)his means that the authority structure, wielding its executive initiative in interpreting the past and projecting the future, edits the forms the liturgy has begun to assume.”63 He acknowledges that this artificial schema is much ‘neater’ than its enactment, but it allows us to understand that in a real church engaging in real worship change is a constant element. What is unclear from these articles is if Fr. Kavanagh is suggesting that this schema is what is being enacted in the liturgical reforms, or if he is critical of the Church making changes from the top down.

60 Kavanagh, “How Rite Develops,” 343.
61 Ibid., 344.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
The final two articles from the 1960’s are clearly criticisms of the way that the liturgical reform envisioned by the Council has actually begun to be carried out. The first, a critical look at the new Eucharistic prayers, applauds the changes to the prayers as a “real, if modest, step forward so long as they do not come to be regarded as the last word or harbingers of the parousia.”\textsuperscript{64} It is essential that despite the hard work and effort that went into the prayers that the Church continues to be open to the kind of change “from below” that he describes in the previous article. Also, after a careful dissection of the prayers, Kavanagh questions why the new prayers are such a hybrid of various rites. “This, in turn, raises once again the question of the basic purpose of such a prayer in the first place.”\textsuperscript{65} He suggests that the committee responsible for the new prayers had perhaps lost sight of their basic purpose. As a liturgical theologian, Fr. Kavanagh had a keen appreciation for the role of history in describing the evolution of the Church and its liturgies. Mixing rites not only leads to confusion, but it evidences a lack of historical understanding of the role cultural context plays in liturgy.

This critical tone is even more prominent in the final article, “Liturgical Needs for Today and Tomorrow.” This article is a conference address and its goal is to call attention to incorrect assumptions about Christian worship. These assumptions, from ritual as periphery to human society, to the role of dogma in relation to worship, and that worship must always have utilitarian outcomes, become important themes in many of his later works.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{65} Kavanagh, “Thoughts on the New Eucharistic Prayers,” 4.
\textsuperscript{66} Aidan Kavanagh, “Liturgical Needs for Today and Tomorrow,” \textit{Worship}, 1969. The critical tone of this article is meant to reinvigorate those in the field to have the fullest view of Christian worship in order to enact the changes made by the Second Vatican Council.
Kavanagh’s theme of critically engaging the liturgical reforms of Vatican II continue in his next series of articles for *Worship*. In “Religious Life and Worship,” published in 1970, Kavanagh addresses a topic that becomes a secondary theme in his later works. The role of the religious in the Church is to act as prophets and examples of how Gospel freedom is lived. Kavanagh himself can be seen as bringing a prophetic voice to the Church’s understanding of worship. Again, Kavanagh connects problems with the liturgy to problems and trends found in society at large, and notes that changing liturgy without addressing the root social issues is usually a lesson in failure.

Before explaining his perspective on the social issues facing members of religious orders, he describes four points to understand who the Christian is. First, the Christian has direct access to God, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. The world and the Church are not separate, rather “God so loved the world that he sent his only son—the same son whom the Church calls Lord.” Second, the communion between the Christian and God allows the whole world to be sacred. Third, this relationship “is identical with that ecclesial state of existence that must be called eucharistic.” Essentially, our relationship with God produces a state of being that is Eucharistic, and this state of being produces ritual. Finally, this explains how all Christians share the priestly ministry through their sacrifice of self.

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68 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 161, on the subject of asceticism, particularly that found in monasticism, “The ascetic is simply a stunningly normal person who stands in constant witness to the normality of Christian orthodoxy in a world flawed into abnormality by human choice.”
70 Ibid., 196. Fr. Kavanagh uses the word ‘direct’.
71 Ibid., 196. The relationship between Church and World is given greater treatment in his mature works.
72 Ibid., 197.
73 Ibid., 199.
The sacrifice of self leads Kavanagh to his point about religious. “But if there is any one thing that makes religious ‘different’ from all others…religious are called by their vocation, their vows, and the life they lead twenty-four hours a day to be prophetic witnesses to this communion in freedom.”\textsuperscript{74} He asks that religious be allowed to live their radical Gospel freedom instead of being called upon to take on other ‘tasks’ that have been assigned them by the church. He reaffirms the importance of the prophetic role within the Church and acknowledges that their unique witness deserves unique worship. “(T)hey do not live as do parishioners, nor should they always have to worship as do parishioners.”\textsuperscript{75} The prophetic ministry of religious life is necessary to the Church and to the Church’s mission in the world. This sentiment is echoed in Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of himself as a monastic and the very real tension he felt in engaging in the world.\textsuperscript{76}

In 1971 and 1972, though still tenured at Notre Dame, Fr. Kavanagh was a visiting professor at Yale Divinity School. He published an article in \textit{Worship} in 1972 that constitutes his early thoughts on baptism and confirmation. These thoughts would later be explored in two books on the topic.\textsuperscript{77} The two most important points that he makes in “Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation,” deal with the community’s role in baptism and confirmation. He broadens classic Christian orthodoxy on the dialogue of conversion to include the role of the faith community.\textsuperscript{78} This “trilogue” between God the caller, the individual called to conversion and the community which has pre-evangelized

\textsuperscript{74} Kavanagh, “Religious Life and Worship,” 200.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{76} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 6-7, “The author takes Christian asceticism seriously…In light of all this, the author is a living paradox.” The paradox is his relationship with the world and the need to harbor wariness about embracing the world.
\textsuperscript{77} See Aidan Kavanagh, \textit{The Shape of Baptism and Confirmation: Origins and Reform}, (New York: Pueblo, 1988).
the individual, is more representative of how conversion and initiation really “work.”

This means that both the community and the individual are changed through the process and it reflects the on-going conversion of members of the faith community. The impetus for Kavanagh’s reflection on this point is how infant baptism was practiced and understood prior to Vatican II. He expands this point at length in The Shape of Baptism.

The 1972 issue of Concilium focused on liturgy, and Fr. Kavanagh prepared an article that addressed the issue of ministry both in the liturgy and in the community. He critiqued the contemporary understanding of ministry as being “excessively narrow,” and focusing almost exclusively on the ministry of the ordained priesthood. Ever the student of history, he notes that term for ministry in the New Testament, diakonia, has a broad definition that goes beyond formal ecclesiastical ministry. “When one speaks of church ministry, it is normal that the operative paradigm is a presbyteral one.” Other real ministries exist in the church but they are not recognized within the ministerial structure. He addresses the issue of the restoration of the deaconate as a permanent order, and notes that until there is a shift in the presbyteral mindset of ministry this order will not be able to serve a truly ministerial role. He also suggests that other orders are added to the

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79 Kavanagh, “Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation,” 266.
80 Ibid., 268.
81 He uses very colorful language to show how the rite had become a shell of its practice in the early church. He connects this with the negative theology of original sin as the reason for infant baptism.
83 Ibid., 55.
84 Ibid., 61.
85 This is still a problem today even though deacons are given specific tasks; many really do not understand why it is important to have a deacon.
official *diakonia* of the church. Instead of “commissioning” lay ministers and readers, there should be a permanent official order for each ministry.\(^8^6\)

The root of the problem of ministry lays in the Church’s limited understanding, but its effects are felt at the most basic level of ministry within the Church, that of marriage and education of children. Instead of viewing marriage as the foundational ministry of the Church (service of spouses and service of Christian formation for children) Kavanagh notes that “all too often…the unintended connivance of official church ministries…view marriage largely as a problem of sexual ethics.”\(^8^7\) Any attempt to broaden the understanding of ministry and service must begin at this foundational level. Any separation between ministry inside the liturgy and outside the liturgy is a misunderstanding of how *diakonia* is expressed in Scripture. Ministry outside the liturgy to assist others with human needs must always be informed by and based upon Christ’s ministry of changing the human condition of sin.\(^8^8\) Again, as noted above, service is the natural outcome of the worshiping Church. Good deeds performed without the reconciling message of the Gospel is not the Christian understanding of ministry or service.

Fr. Kavanagh’s next published work is from 1973 and was written on the theme of ritual. Fr. Kavanagh based his understanding of liturgical ritual within the larger context of societal ritual in general. This is one reason why he asserts that problems in the liturgy can and must be traced to problems in society at large. In *The Roots of Ritual*, a collection of essays that presents an interdisciplinary approach to ritual, Fr. Kavanagh provides a sociological view at the role of ritual in human society. First, in the

\(^8^6\) Kavanagh, “Ministries in the Community and in the Liturgy,” 61.
\(^8^7\) Ibid., 66.
\(^8^8\) Ibid., 56.
introduction, he notes that “ritual…is a basic human language rooted in man’s social nature and pervading his social environment.”

This is the frame for his essay, “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,” and he notes that liturgical ritual is just one of many rituals that human beings participate in. As such, it is important to recognize that our understanding and acceptance of the importance of ritual is shifting. He is reflecting on the youth culture of the seventies and the growth in developmental psychology that are reestablishing a ritualized view of the world during the time that he is writing.

Ritual, whether liturgical or social, is passed on through tradition. Kavanagh relies on the works of Erik Erikson to establish how important ritual is to both personal development and to social cohesion. “[T]he patterns of repetitive behavior correspond to and, therefore, may be said to carry, the inchoate and largely incommunicable experience of reality.” It is participation in this reality that builds society and it continues to build the tradition of ritual behavior. Using the disciplines of history and sociology were not new endeavors for Fr. Kavanagh at this time, but one may also wonder if his experience at Yale, an interdenominational institution, may have influenced him to look at the nature of ritual from such a broad perspective.

Writing a decade after the Second Vatican council, Kavanagh explores the related areas of reform and renewal in his article, “The Norm of Baptism: The New Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.” This article was published after he began his work at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and Yale Divinity School. He became the acting director

90 Aidan Kavanagh, “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,” in The Roots of Ritual, ed., James Shaughnessy, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 145. He notes, “[u]ntil recently the consensus of the Western intellectual community was fairly solid in its assumption that ritual not only had little or nothing to do with the development of the individual human person, but that it was inimical to such development.”
91 Ibid., 158.
of the Institute not long after it was founded in 1973. In this article, Fr. Kavanagh highlights how emphasizing the Eucharist in liturgical reforms has not brought about needed renewal in the Church. As noted above, Fr. Kavanagh felt that far more work had been done on the Eucharist, and not enough on the other sacraments. In this article he notes that the renewal that the Church seeks can be found in other reformed rites, specifically in the reformed rite of initiation. Speaking of these reforms from Vatican II, “(t)he documents, especially the order of initiating adults, provide structures that do not merely assume personal and corporate renewal but require it.”

He points out that baptism and Eucharist require one another; are built upon one another. “(A) policy that regards indiscriminate infant baptism as normative cannot sustain a view of faith in God’s word that is adequate for anything else than eucharistic malpractice...a policy that regards the eucharist as anything less than the celebration of people’s communion in faith in God’s word...cannot sustain a view of baptism as much else than a saving of infants from original sins and the jaws of hell.” He then makes his case for viewing adult baptism as normative. This is a continuing trend in his written work and is treated to the fullest extent in The Shape of Baptism.

In the article, Kavanagh reviews the documents of Vatican II and notes that infant baptism is not described as normative, that an emphasis on adult baptism and a longer catechumenate implies that the person seeking baptism is an adult. This, he argues, is then the norm of baptism and he returns to early Church sources to emphasize the

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 146.
relationship between initiation and Eucharist. The catechumenate “function as a corporate presence witnessing constantly to the church her need for continuing conversion in Christ.” Living a life of constant conversion and renewal goes beyond participating in Eucharist once a week, and helps the Church to deepen its understanding of itself as a liturgical entity.

Fr. Kavanagh visits the role of the catechumenate and adult baptism as normative in an article written for the *Notre Dame Journal of Education*. As articulated in many of the previous articles, Kavanagh views ritual as a complex function of societal survival. While he agrees that religious education and liturgy need to be open to real dialogue, he cautions that the language of education and academe can be foreign to and do violence to liturgical celebration. “Institutional religious authorities attempt to usurp the festivity of liturgical celebration, turning the liturgical act into a set of ceremonial tableaux meant to inculcate correct, quantifiable, and therefore administratable doctrines.”

The liturgy, as a ritual, cultic act works to shape its participants through repetition and in deference to its historical foundation; it does not provide lessons that

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95 Cf. George Worgul, “The Ecclesiology of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” *Louvain Studies*, 1976: vol. VI, no. 2, 159-169. It should be noted that the rite itself does not state that RCIA is the norm of baptism. Fr. Kavanagh infers this from the changes that this new rite would make in the life of the Church. This is covered in detail in the chapter on his theology of initiation. Worgul’s article does not make this assumption, but does note in reference to the rite, “There appears to be an admission that there is no birthright to membership in the Church, but that membership is a privilege to be worked for and won by a conversion, a commitment, and actions commensurate to the gospel of Jesus Christ.” 162. This reflects his thesis that the rite recognizes that culture has changed, “There is no medieval presupposition that being born into a Christian family guarantees the future choice of living as a Christian.” Ibid. One may infer that this means those being baptized are adults, but there is no statement that this is the new norm of the rite.


97 This is important for Kavanagh’s understanding of ecclesiology as sacramental realism (150) and will be gone over in depth later in this dissertation.


99 Kavanagh, “Teaching Through the Liturgy,” 39. He notes, “What is at stake here is not rational discourse but life and death: Survival is cultically conceived of in terms of absolute reality not in terms of truth or falsehood.”

100 Ibid., 36.
one is meant to learn. “It is elusive in its formative impact because rather than being a channel of meaning it is a catalyst of the multiform meanings its participants bring with them to the liturgical act.”\textsuperscript{101} In the same way, the catechumenate is less about teaching converts correct doctrine and more about leading the way for the long, hard road of conversion. As a group, the catechumenate can assist the faithful in their on-going formation and recommitment to conversion. Fr. Kavanagh’s own conversion experience led him to coin the phrase “conversion therapy,” mentioned above, and note that the role of the Church is to support the catechumens as they move through their conversion.

Conversion, particularly in relation to initiation, remained a large focus of Kavanagh’s work. In his printed address to the North American Academy of Liturgy, he expresses the importance of the liturgist’s role in convincing the Church of the “liturgical dimensions of conversion.”\textsuperscript{102} This address is quite self-reflective and very self-deprecating. In it he looks at the changes that have been brought to the liturgy and how liturgists, liturgical theologians and the Church as a whole have misunderstood the nature of worship. He is making a philosophical point that the liturgy, like the Sabbath, exists for us, and liturgists cannot thrust their own selves (preferences, etc.) into the liturgy without disrupting its primary goal of providing the faithful access to the Christ who is salvation.

This address briefly touches on two points that become a large part of his more mature work: liturgical language and liturgical music. Both of these are sub points of the nature of ritual. As he notes that liturgists, himself included, have focused too narrowly on correct vernacular translation. “For this reason, liturgical English is presently a pidgin

\textsuperscript{101} Kavanagh, “Teaching Through the Liturgy,” 41.
form of the language possessing all the stylistic flair of a wet potato chip.”  

Ritual thrives on repetition and cadence, and even a translated liturgy must work to express the magnitude of its objective (worship of God) by providing something more than correct rendition. The question of liturgical music is simple: Is it entertainment, or is it to give a voice to worship? “We seem to be ignorant of the fact that the liturgical act without music loses much of its sonic rhythm, and that rhythm is a major component of all ritual activity.” The importance of ritual and its sociological foundation has been noted repeatedly and will continue to be a large part of Kavanagh’s work.

The articles explored above represent the beginning of Fr. Kavanagh’s theological thoughts, and are important for understanding how these thoughts were developed in his books. Fr. Kavanagh published fewer articles in the 1980’s and 1990’s. One would assume that this is partly because of his leadership roles at Yale. He was the acting dean at Yale Divinity School in 1989-1990. This is also the time during which he published his four books. Many of the articles written during this time continue the themes discussed in his earlier articles, and seem to be given greater consideration in his books. There are two articles published during this time that are noteworthy and will assist with the consideration of his mature works.

The final two articles to be considered in this chapter are very similar in content despite having very dissimilar titles. This alludes to the fact that Fr. Kavanagh had begun to synthesize his own theology. While none of these themes are new to his writing their

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104 This is akin to poetry and the emotive qualities of language. We can see recognition of this issue in some of the recent liturgical language changes.
105 Kavanagh, “Liturgical Business Unfinished and Unbegun,” 357. Again, our current liturgy includes many more parts which are sung. I am comparing this with the “low masses” that I experienced as a child and adolescent, when the entire mass was spoken.
consistency is evident of Fr. Kavanagh’s mature liturgical theology. This mature theology is articulated most completely in his books, but these articles can serve as the gateway to defining and critiquing his theology. His books will be the main source for exploring his theology in subsequent chapters.

A few of Fr. Kavanagh’s previous articles are perceived and direct critiques on the implementation of the revised liturgy following the Second Vatican Council. The final articles continue the critique. While Fr. Kavanagh’s theology appears to become more conservative in his later works, he is always clear that he does not disapprove of the reforms made to the liturgy by the council. After providing some biting commentary about the implementation of the new liturgy following the study used in The Awakening Church: 25 Years of Liturgical Renewal, Fr. Kavanagh makes it clear that “I am a creature of the Second Vatican Council…I am a steadfast advocate of its reforms and will remain so as long as I live.”

The problems with the liturgy are not so much in the actual reformed liturgy, so much as they are with how the liturgy is used. While Fr. Kavanagh was no fan of the Tridentine Mass, he notes fondly that the Church of that era, and its liturgy, were “disciplined.” It was this discipline, and communal suffering through “a liturgy filled with non sequitur,” which made the liturgy an open and egalitarian experience. He contrasts this with the way the reformed liturgy is enacted.

In this essay as well as in an article for Studia Liturgica, Fr. Kavanagh bemoans the “embourgeoisement” of the Church. In the essay, Fr. Kavanagh attributes this to

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107 Ibid., 92. (Italics his)
108 Ibid., 91.
the receding of traditional doctrine on the holiness of God and the sinful[...]

In the article for *Studia Liturgica*, he makes a connection between the reformed liturgy’s focus on the middle class and the Western Church’s emphasis on textuality. Textualization has a detrimental effect on ritualization. “[W]hy and how have they moved away from using liturgical words as performative utterances to subordinating the entire liturgy, both words and actions, to printed texts meant for recitation?”\(^\text{111}\) The quickness of the change seen in the reformed rite had the impact of trivializing and marginalizing ritual performance. This is because liturgy was seen mainly as text: change the text; fix the liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh’s criticism of this focus on the text will be explored in more detail later, but he makes a fair point that ritual as it is actually performed, cannot be changed as quickly or as cleanly as a text. This may have led to the problems he notes in the enactment of the reformed liturgy.

It is difficult to feel fully informed about Fr. Kavanagh’s personal history. Hopefully this chapter has shed some light on his commitment to liturgical theology and his passion for communicating its importance to the community of the faithful. It has been evidenced that the important themes of Fr. Kavanagh’s work grew and developed over his academic career, perhaps in response to his different teaching appointments. Clearly, one can see that his writings evolved from explaining the changes made in the liturgy by the Second Vatican Council to criticizing their implementation. His warnings to the American Church of watering down liturgy and creating a middle-class Catholic are important to our own understanding of the continued liturgical revisions now facing the Church. While Fr. Kavanagh’s mature works will be the basis for exploring his

\(^{110}\) Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 95.
\(^{111}\) Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization: The Case of Western Liturgical Usage,” 70.
liturgical theology in depth, and as such, were not treated in this chapter, the foundation of his theology has been laid. Fr. Kavanagh’s books represent the fullest development of his theology, and the themes previously considered are woven into a neat structure that deserves a great deal of exploration.
CHAPTER II

PERSPECTIVE AND DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

This chapter is devoted to highlighting the definitions of liturgy, ecclesiology, sacrament and ritual according to Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective. This is a somewhat constructive endeavor for a few reasons. First, these four concepts/events are interwoven within Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology and throughout his works. Second, they are interrelated and interdependent in any discussion of Church and liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh weaves them together because they are naturally enmeshed in the living worship that constitutes the Church. However, it is important to undertake this step in order to clarify Fr. Kavanagh’s specific liturgical theology explored in the following chapter.

One necessary component to understanding Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective on these four concepts, and his liturgical theology, is the role history plays in liturgical theology. In proposing a method for liturgical theology, Alexander Schmemann highlights the importance of this historical approach. When speaking of the reality of growth and variation in the liturgy over time, he notes, “The absence of development would be the sign of a fatal sclerosis…it is very important to know, first, whether all these changes express the Church’s ‘rule of prayer’ in equal measure…and not just a series of more or less accidental metamorphoses. It is evident that liturgical theology must begin with the historical study of worship.”¹ It is also evident in reading Fr. Kavanagh’s books that he appropriates Schmemann’s approach seriously.²

Liturgy

² As noted in the introduction, Fr. Kavanagh was influenced greatly by Schmemann’s work. In many ways, Fr. Kavanagh mirrors some of Schmemann’s themes in a manner that is very approachable.
Fr. Kavanagh’s primary description of liturgy is that it is “theologia prima.”³ The acts of liturgy and worship are fundamentally theological and the source of all secondary theology. Liturgy as theologia prima, and its implications for liturgical theology, will be covered in great detail in the next chapter. Fr. Kavanagh describes liturgy in this manner because of the perspective he brings to each liturgical act. He paraphrases Urban Holmes when he writes, “good liturgy borders on the vulgar…leads regularly to the edge of chaos, and that from this regular flirt with doom comes a theology different from any other.”⁴ This vast and dangerous approach to liturgy may catch the average churchgoer off guard, but it is only this approach that can support Fr. Kavanagh’s claim of liturgy as theologia prima.

The importance of liturgy in this perspective lies in the relationship between Church and World. According to Fr. Kavanagh, liturgy is the Church doing World; not the World as it is, but the World as it has become and is becoming through Christ. “This is because it is not fundamentally the Church which has been redeemed in Christ but the World itself.”⁵ Ever the student of history, Fr. Kavanagh spends much of the first half of On Liturgical Theology in an extended meditation on the nature of the relationship between Church and World through time. He also bemoans the gradual flight of the Church from the city to the suburbs and the detrimental affect it has had on the relationship with the World.⁶ He suggests that this flight has led to a Church that seeks to

³ Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 75. Note that Schmemann also articulates this position several times in his works consulted for this paper.
⁴ Ibid., 73.
⁵ Ibid., 43.
⁶ Ibid., chapters 2 and 3. Please note that he explores the suburbanization of the Church in both literal and metaphorical terms. Literally, the great Churches of Rome were forced to be built on the outskirts of the city. Metaphorically, he decries the Western Church’s comfort with reinforcing middle-class values. In his closing of chapter four, he speaks sarcastically of our discomfort with the world and the city, “[W]e drove fast through the inner City, where money and social recipes littered empty streets lined by massage parlors.
comfort its congregants, not challenge them. It is certainly not a Church whose liturgy would often lead to the edge of chaos.

This historical perspective is also evidenced by Fr. Kavanagh’s relating of the great processional liturgies in the ancient cities. “The time-scale of this entire series of services was the whole of a Sunday. The space-scale of it was the whole city.” The Sunday liturgy was a series of seven events that moved throughout the city. As he notes, very few people participated in all the events, nor were they expected to, but the whole rhythm of the day was built around the various parts of Sunday liturgy. Being visual and vocal, and of such large scale, the events of Sunday were the way the Church showed the World how to be the World redeemed. It is this liturgy that is *theologia prima*. “We today can hardly be expected to understand how liturgy could be considered seriously as the basic condition for doing theology…so long as we perceive liturgical worship as a pastel endeavor shrunk to only forty-five minutes and consisting of some organ music…a few lines of scripture, a short talk on religion…and perhaps a quick consumption of disks or pellets and a beverage.” While it is possible to consider Fr. Kavanagh’s love of nostalgia a weakness, it is important to listen to the critiques of our current liturgical practices through this historical perspective.

The importance of liturgy has also to do with the role of worship in the growth of the Church and the Church’s self-understanding. “For in worship alone is the church gathered in the closest obvious proximity to its fundamental values, values which are

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and butcher shops displaying goods no sane tourist would touch. We deplored it all, but the deploring seasoned nicely our return home to the suburbs where things were at least neat…and our blessings stood bright and shiny in the medicine cabinet…We could attend our neighborhood church to be soothed in the knowledge that all was well as our tour guide slipped into leotards to dance, yet again, and interpretation of the Twenty-third Psalm.” 68.

7 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 57.
8 Ibid., 60.
always assuming stimulative form in time, space, image, word, and repeated act.”
He likens the growth of the Church to the growth of an individual; human beings require stimulation in order to acquire personal identity. So to, the Church requires the stimulation of “constant and increasingly complex worship” to grow into a Gospel-inspired, self-possessed communion between God and World. A Church whose worship does not grow becomes unstimulated and dysfunctional. This is the state of the Church Fr. Kavanagh perceives. As the Church’s worship changed from the civil liturgy described above, and as the Church took on an increasingly middle-class, suburban life, the values that grounded the Church shifted. Liturgy became more about self-help therapy and less about the Church exemplifying the World redeemed.

One of the symptoms of the embourgeoisement of the Church is the focus on individual rather than corporate worship. Citing the “evil effects of scholastic theology” Schmemann notes that an artificial, and not historically supported, distinction has been made between ‘corporate’ and ‘private’ worship. Private worship is that which is done to meet some need. “[T]his distinction between ‘corporate’ and ‘private’ worship is a contradiction of the basic and ancient concept of Christian worship as the public act of the Church, in which there is nothing private at all, nor can there be, since this would destroy the very nature of the Church.” Sacraments such as baptism, confirmation/chrismation and marriage are considered private and done only at special request. This has the effect of both subverting the Eucharist to just another sacrament,

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 63.
12 Schmemann, “The Task and Method of Liturgical Theology,” 59. In Schmemann’s mind, the problem of defining liturgical theology can be traced back to the Scholastics and the splintering of theology and increased emphasis on dogmatics.
13 Ibid., 59-60.
and separating the other sacraments from their source in the Eucharist and corporate worship.¹⁴

The individualization of worship should not be confused with an attitude that the Church is ‘anti-individual’. As Fr. Kavanagh notes in his article on ritual, “an unindividuated group of human individuals is not a society, and even less a community.”¹⁵ For the Church to be a community, it must be made of individuals who gather to worship corporately. What Schmemann criticizes, and to which criticism Fr. Kavanagh would agree, is a type of worship that is about meeting some individual person’s individual need. “Liturgy is not a thing but a meeting of persons, the celebration of and the expression of an experiential relationship: our relation to God and to one another in Christ through the Spirit.”¹⁶ Essentially, the worship of the Church supposes that we all have the same needs: to be saved from our sinfulness and to worship in thanksgiving to God. The importance of the individual Christian in the liturgy is fundamental to both liturgy as theologia prima and to Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective on ecclesiology.

Ecclesiology

Fr. Kavanagh’s definition of liturgy as theologia prima necessitates a type of “ecclesiology from the pews” perspective. Liturgy is not done to Christians; Christians do the liturgy as a corporate body. This is Fr. Kavanagh’s fundamental ecclesiology. He notes ecclesiology as a concept and independent subject of study is a rather new

¹⁴ Schmemann, “The Task and Method of Liturgical Theology,” 61. This connection is one that Fr. Kavanagh also makes, and it will be explored in more detail in the chapter on initiation.
¹⁵ Kavanagh, “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,” 152.
development in the Church. “Ancient theologians are remarkably silent about Church in our modern terms, which is not to say that they do not mention it or concern themselves with it…their concern with it lie more in the direction of seeing the Church as a function of faith rather than faith as a possible function of a problematic institution.”

Church presupposes faith. Taking his cue from the ancient theologians mentioned above, Fr. Kavanagh takes an attitude of being the Church rather than talking about the Church; hence, the importance of the assembly of Christians as agents of the liturgical act.

Again, Fr. Kavanagh takes his cue from history. He notes that the Jewish and Christian traditions have expressed their faith by participating in regular, communal worship. “The ordinary, normal Jew or Christian need not be theologically literate or possess a theological degree, and it would surely strike them as odd to suggest that gaining such a degree is somehow more important than the Kiddush meal on Sabbath or the Mass on Sunday.”

Again, corporate worship of God presumes faith. Expression of faith through regular assemblies was considered natural. This natural state of faith and worship creates the Church and the secondary theology which has become ecclesiology. Fr. Kavanagh criticizes the contemporary approach to this secondary study of Church and sees it as symptomatic of the rise of an individualization of worship. This also supports his critique of contemporary liturgy as being about self-help of individual church-goers.

Fr. Kavanagh’s fundamental ecclesiology as the action of corporate worship in liturgy relies heavily on symbol and sacrament. As noted above, liturgy is the Church

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17 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 53.
18 Ibid., 56.
19 Ibid., 56.
20 Ibid., 54. He suggests that our obsession with talking about the Church is a particular pathology. “They could not have imagined, I think, that Christian faith could be lived in any other way than socially, communally, ecclesially, with one foot deep in the scriptures and the other deep in apostolic teaching and fellowship.”
21 Ibid., 61. This is also related to his critique of the use of texts in the Western Church.
doing World, and this has its historical roots in the great urban liturgies Fr. Kavanagh highlights. He explains the connection between the three entities, Church, World and city, in this manner, “[t]o discourse about any one of them is to discourse simultaneously about the other two on distinct but inseparable levels. This is why Christian discourse is radically symbolic. Symbols fold in much meaning from different levels rather than exclude it.”

According to Schmemann, this is a definition of symbol that we have lost the ability to understand. “The most prevalent, ‘current’ answer to this question (of what is symbolic) consists in an identification of the symbol with a representation or illustration.” The problem with considering symbols as being representation is that they become merely representative. That is, they become something that is different from reality and “in essence even contrary to it.”

A symbol cannot fold in the types of meaning that Fr. Kavanagh describes if it has become antithetical to reality. Christians cannot take the symbol seriously, or even have it not distract them from the reality of their individual worship if they have lost the ability to understand the symbolic. Symbolic discourse is about understanding that the symbol participates in the reality that it communicates. “[T]oday we understand the symbol as the representation or sign of an absent reality, something that is not really in the sign itself…in the original understanding it is the manifestation and presence of the other reality—but precisely as other, which, under given circumstances, cannot be manifested and made present in any other way than as a symbol.”

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 38.
26 Ibid.
Schmemann speaks of is one of grace. For this reason, the symbol never divulges the fullness of the reality it manifests. “[I]n the symbol everything manifests the spiritual reality, but not everything pertaining to the spiritual reality appears embodied in the symbol. The symbol is always partial, always imperfect.”27 Thus the layers of meaning that a symbol reveals cannot give the whole meaning, but opens itself to constantly reveal reality in new and changing ways.

Fr. Kavanagh blames the suburbanization of the Church for Christians losing the ability to understand symbolic language, particularly language of the paradoxical. One aspect of the blame for the suburbanization of the Church lies at the foot of concepts like ecclesiology. The Church has started to think about itself too much, and Christians have forgotten that they are created by the Church, rather than the Church being created by Christians.28 This is a paring down of the symbolic, as if something is only real if it is created and witnessed first-hand. Schmemann illustrates this well, “Thus, two thousand years ago the Savior came forth to preach the gospel in reality, and now we illustrate this act symbolically in order to recall for ourselves the meaning of the event, its significance for us, etc.”29 This popular sense of memorial as an event that happened only in the past, and to which we have only ‘symbolic’ access is a symptom of the lack of our ability to understand the symbolic. The anamnesis of Christian tradition also includes a sense of making the event present in the life of the Church.30 The inability to see reality, albeit

27 Schmemann, The Eucharist, 39.
28 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 46.
30 Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, (Portland, ME: The American Orthodox Press, 1966), 14. See also Joseph Jungmann, S.J., The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development, (New York, NY: Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1959), 134. In his section on the meaning of the mass, Jungmann offers the correct understanding of memorial in relation to faith. First he challenges the notion that sacrifice is not the exclusive basis for the mass. “The Mass is a solemnity dedicated to the memory of Christ...And further, it is not merely a remembrance of His person, but a recollection of His work.” He
multi-layered and paradoxical reality, in the symbolic has led us to viewing the symbolic language of liturgy as “decorations for the two or three acts…that alone provide, so to speak, ‘reality’ to the liturgy.”31 Again, Schmemann faults Scholastic theology and its focus on identifying the ‘real presence’ of Christ with the consecratory formula.32 This became the important moment of mass. This became the moment of reality; all else became window dressing.

Fr. Kavanagh explains that the Church’s concept of and discourse about itself has historically been sacramental. “I take this therefore to be utterly primary, basic and fundamental for ecclesiology. This sacramental discourse transcends and subordinates the discourse of academic theological reflection on the Church.”33 One can only talk about Church through the participation in the worship of the Church. “While the Church may often seem little more than an institution like all others, it has from the beginning been deemed more than that because its members are graced people.”34 They are a graced people because of the faith that draws them together in liturgical worship. The estrangement of the real from the symbolic highlighted by Schmemann has caused us to forget that sacraments do not and cannot operate independently of the Church. “Rather, they (sacraments) are given to the Church, they are performed within her and only

next describes the mystery of the mass. This aspect of mystery can be compared to Schmemann’s and Kavanagh’s critique of the loss of symbolic thinking. We cannot truly appreciate the mystery of Christ made present to his Church because we think of memorial as the memory of a past event. Jungmann asserts that it is Christ’s passion and death that “is continually being made present and actual—in the institution of the Last Supper…There, in a manner that is full of mystery, this suffering is made present…under the signs of bread and wine, the elements of a simple meal,” 135.

31 Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 31.
32 Cf. Jungmann, 135. He notes that what is made present in the mystery of the mass is Christ’s Presence and that the mass of the Middle Ages took this to high form. “In fact, the whole life of Christ, the whole history of Redemption is seen represented in the Mass.” While this may have had the negative effect of reducing our understanding of the symbolic which Schmemann criticizes, Jungmann notes, “this institution Is a memorial ceremony, a sacred action which recalls into the midst of the congregation a redemptive work which occurred long ago, a ‘mystery-action’.”
33 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 46.
34 Ibid., 47.
through the power given her to perform them and, finally, they are performed on her behalf.”

The sacraments are not representative of a supernatural reality. Instead, they reveal the true nature of God’s creation.

The true nature of the Church is sacrament. “This in turn means that in the Orthodox experience and tradition the Church is herself a sacrament.” Schmemann explains that a sacrament is “both cosmic and eschatological.” The reality manifested in the sacrament is both of the world as created by God and the fulfillment of the world in the Kingdom of God. He applies this definition to the Church by explaining, “She is a sacrament in the cosmic sense because she manifests in ‘this world’ the genuine world of God, as he first created it…She is a sacrament in the eschatological dimension because the original world of God’s creation, revealed by the Church, has already been saved by Christ.” Because the Church itself is sacramental and a sacrament, Fr. Kavanagh explains its worship and its fundamental ecclesiology by explaining sacrament and the language of sacrament.

**Sacrament**

After explaining the interwoven nature of the four concepts under consideration in this chapter, it should come as no surprise that Fr. Kavanagh explains his definition of sacrament and symbol in a chapter entitled, “The Church.” It is impossible to speak of the Church without speaking in the language of sacrament. This is the core of his perspective on the topic. Sacrament is not a thing, or even necessarily an event; it is primarily a language, the language of the Church. As a language, its definition is broad

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36 Ibid., 35.
37 Ibid. 34.
enough to include more than just religious sacraments. “A human artifact is necessarily to some extent sacrament, that is, an artificially induced relationship of goods which human agency freights with significance vital or fatal.”40 Fr. Kavanagh is explaining that the tradition common to both Jews and Christians has not spent much time trying to understand the meaning of the created and natural world, “but rather to presume that their meaning is contained simply in their creaturely existence, to revere that existence, and then to bless their Creator for it.”41 The natural world is not sacrament; rather our creating of things from the natural world and investing meaning in them requires the language of sacrament. It also requires, from a religious perspective, discipline found only through grace to keep us from perverting the meanings we make from the objects we create.

Without explicitly stating so, Fr. Kavanagh has drawn a distinction between symbol and sacrament. While he noted that all human artifacts can be considered some level of sacrament, it would be more accurate to say that they are symbols. Symbolic language is similar to sacramental language, but it might be fair to say that sacrament deals with a greater intensity of meaning which is overtly religious. Or, perhaps, that symbol can only draw its language from the primary language of sacrament needed to understand our roles as secondary agents of creation.42 This can be inferred by his comparison between the use of perspective in painting and iconography. Certainly, painting, and its use of perspective to create depth uses the language of symbols. Fr.

40 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 41.
41 Ibid., 40.
42 Interestingly, Schmemann seems to suggest that sacramental language finds its roots in symbol. He reserves the word sacrament and sacramental for speaking of the Church and the sacraments enacted through her, but he explains that we have lost the understanding of the sacraments because we have lost the ability to think symbolically.
Kavanagh refers to this as “artistic discourse” and contrasts it with the “sacramental discourse” of icons.43

We have been blessed with the ability to create, recreate and invest meaning in those things created “naturally” by God. This requires sacrament, and sacramental discourse, as in the world of icons, is based on inverted perspective. “His (the icon painter’s) point of departure in perspective is not found in the illusory depth of the image which attempts to reproduce visible space, but before the image, in the spectator himself.”44 While symbolic or artistic discourse invests human artifacts with meaning that is “natural” to humanity, sacramental discourse inverts these “natural” meanings from the perspective of the Gospel.45 As Fr. Kavanagh notes that, “the first shall, be last…the humiliation of the cross is the supreme victory.”46 The inverse perspective of sacrament is made possible through grace.

This is the intersection of ecclesiology and sacrament. The Church is constituted by those who live by the inverted perspective of the Gospel.47 “This seems to imply that the Church as a faith-society is sacramental in its very constitution, and that it functions as a many-faceted, dynamic, and corporate sacrament in its own right.”48 As a sacrament, the Church inverts humanity’s perspective. The World does not make the Church; rather, the Church makes the World, and this is the role of liturgy as the Church doing World.

43 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 41.
44 Ibid., 41.
45 “Natural” implies that human sinfulness has distorted the original nature of creation. “Sin is itself perceived here as a falling away of man, and in him of all creation, from this sacramentality.” Schmemann, The Eucharist, 33-34. The true nature of reality was its original sacramentality. Grace not only makes the inverse perspective possible, but it allows the real nature of the world to break into our sinful state. “If in baptism water can become a ‘laver of regeneration,’ if our earthly food…can be transformed into partaking of the body and blood of Christ…it is because all of creation was originally summoned and destined for the fulfillment of the divine economy.” Ibid., 34.
46 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 41.
47 Ibid., 42.
48 Ibid., 42.
As sacrament, the Church is also the icon that uses the world as the starting point and draws the world’s attention to itself and its meaning as created and sustained by God. As noted above, the Church itself is a sacrament as it “exists in order to be always changing into that same reality that she manifests, the fulfillment of the invisible in the visible, the heavenly in the earthly, the spiritual in the material.” Schmemann would argue that the entire action of the liturgy is sacrament, not only the moment of consecration in the Eucharist. The assembling of the Church, the doing of the liturgy is a sacramental action.

In his critique of contemporary ecclesiology, Fr. Kavanagh noted that Christian language has always been symbolic. The problem with secondary types of theology, such as ecclesiology, is that they can be merely symbolic. Fr. Kavanagh’s complaint is that these types of theology have lost their rootedness in sacramental discourse. Without sacrament as the fundamental way to understand the meanings of symbols and their relationships, these theologies may have a tendency to approach the meanings with the inappropriate perspective. The Church becomes a thing, a creation that can have meaning independent of the World. The World loses its ability to be seen as the starting point for understanding its created nature, and we assume that we have created both Church and World.

Ritual

The final concept under consideration in this chapter is that of ritual. Of the concepts noted, this one is perhaps the most difficult to express from Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective, as it is the one that is implied throughout his theology without being explicitly stated. Even in his book, *Elements of Rite*, Fr. Kavanagh gives only vague definitions of ritual and rite. Ritual is intricately connected to liturgy as *theologia prima*

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because of the change that takes place in the worshiping community after every liturgy. This change can only happen because the repetitious nature of the event of liturgy; change can only be tracked in hindsight and ritual ensures the repeated act.\textsuperscript{50}

Before attempting to define ritual in relation to religion and liturgy, it is important to note that Fr. Kavanagh views ritual in the larger perspective of human life lived in social community. Liturgy is one type of ritual among many.\textsuperscript{51} Ritual in this context is patterns of repetitive human activities that “exist in order to deal with reality, as it is encountered, by establishing not the ‘truth’ of things but rather the coherence of human response to the real.”\textsuperscript{52} Ritual provides the language to communicate the realities of life that are incommunicable, and do so in a shared and public manner.\textsuperscript{53} Ritual in this sense has the very important task of communicating values, either social/civic or religious, to the group. Ritual communicates these values through shared experience rather than through rational discourse and assent. This perspective on ritual is important for understanding ritual’s relationship to liturgy, sacrament and Church.

It was proposed above that Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of sacrament is that it is language and inverted perspective that allows the Church and the World to define themselves in relation to their Creator. Sacrament is also language infused with grace, as it is grace which provides the inverted perspective and manifests the reality revealed in the symbol. The sacramental language of the Church is one that shows both God’s original creation and God’s in-breaking Kingdom. Grace also protects symbolic language from perverting the correct meaning of our created artifacts. Fr. Kavanagh’s

\textsuperscript{50} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 74. Fr. Kavanagh implies that the changes made in each subsequent liturgical act are the locale of \textit{theologia prima}. The changes are incremental due to the template of ritual.
\textsuperscript{51} Kavanagh, “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,” 154.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 158.
perspective of ritual is that it is also language. In addition to being the language of societal values, it is the language of liturgy; the language of worship. As such, he uses language as an analogy for liturgy. “Nor are language and liturgy ever antiseptic; they have been amply inhabited by us, they wear our smudges and bear our smell. Because they inhale the human condition, language and liturgy change slowly and in similar ways.” Like language, liturgy is guided by rules, and while liturgical rubrics are not equated with ritual or rite in Fr. Kavanagh’s theology, rubrics are important for allowing ritual events to continue over time. Rubrics are also the keys to structure that can allow the liturgical theologian to map liturgical tradition and changes through history.

Rubrics keep liturgical practice from falling victim to changing cultural whims and tastes, and while rubrics have an important role in the practice of worship and in the historical mapping of liturgical change, rubrics cannot be seen as the focal point of liturgy. Liturgy “gives rubrics their reason and values.” Rubrics and liturgical laws are part of a “checklist of factors” to be considered while constructing a specific liturgical event. “They must be taken seriously out of respect for the celebrating assembly, not out of an obsession that one or another of them might be discovered at the Last Judgment to have been divinely instituted.” This is just a humorous way of saying that they are not the end-all and be-all of ritual or liturgy.

Taken in the context presented, the ritual of liturgy shapes the Church’s response to the reality of the living God. No society, not even the Church, can exist without

57 Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 3.
58 Ibid., 8.
59 Ibid.
rituals, and Fr. Kavanagh points out some ways in which the nature of ritual is misunderstood. He criticizes the teaching from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that the reformed rites should be simple and resist useless repetitions. “[H]uman rituals are rarely short, clear and without repetition. They are more often long, richly ambiguous, and vastly repetitive...This takes time, requires repetition, and embraces many different facets of meaning the participants bring with them to the act.”

Repetition is necessary for rhythm and rhythm is necessary for meaning. If ritual is indeed that which communicates the incommunicable, it is appropriate to agree with Fr. Kavanagh’s critique. Communicating the reality of God and the values of a lived Gospel life requires the fullness of a vastly repetitive, ritual-formed liturgy.

Fr. Kavanagh’s short book, Elements of Rite, mentioned above, provides additional insight into the nature of ritual from his perspective. This book is written as a guide and informal commentary on liturgical practice, and what he refers to as liturgy can also be read as ritual. For example, he notes that it is “the very nature of ritual that it is subject to change.” He then continues, “Whether the liturgy changes or not is determined less by individual elements internal to it than by the state of the faithful assembly which celebrates it.” While he is making an important point about the changing nature of liturgy, a point also made by Schmemann, he is also using ritual as a synonym for liturgy. This is appropriate given the interwoven nature of the two. For the

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60 Kavanagh, “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,” 149.
61 Kavanagh, Elements of Rite, 5.
62 Ibid., 7.
63 Ibid.
64 See Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 14; 16-20. Schmemann argues for the importance of the historical study of liturgy by noting that the ‘rule of prayer’ determines the Church’s ‘rule of faith’. He also stresses that this historical study assists in understanding the role of tradition. “The Church has never believed that complete uniformity in ceremonies and prayers is an obligatory condition of her unity,” 16.
purposes of finishing these key definitions, liturgy, from Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective, is
the Church doing World, and ritual is the language used in this process and part of the
specific enacting of the liturgy.

The language of liturgy, ritual, is multi-faceted. In addition to the important and
appropriate role of rubrics mentioned above, Fr. Kavanagh notes many parts of ritual that
should be paid proper attention. As a language, ritual is contextual. The context of
liturgical celebration is that it is enacted in time and space. To this end, ritual has to deal
with physical space and the people participating in the ritual. Fr. Kavanagh, insists that
“Churches are not carpeted…Liturgical ambience must challenge, for one comes to the
liturgy to transact the public business of death and life rather than to be tucked in with
fables and featherpuffs.”

It is possible to read this statement as an overly practical assertion to liturgical space, but there is something important about the nature of ritual in
this sentiment.

While Fr. Kavanagh has stated that the liturgy is one type of ritual, he has not said
that all rituals are of equal value. Certainly, a ritual that deals with life and death carries
more weight than the ritual two sports teams undertake in preparation for a game.

That the language of liturgy is meant to traffic in such matters underscores the importance that
must be placed on ritual. A Church that tries to comfort its members and becomes a

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66 Of course, one may be hard-pressed to explain this difference to the average person. This is at least a
two-part problem. First, as Fr. Kavanagh expresses in “The Role of Ritual in Personal Development,”
Western society had largely given up ritual in preference for the rational. Ritual was considered, “a
primitive retardation to intellectual growth in a modern world,” 145. The return to the importance of ritual
is only one to two generations old, and as such, we have not yet learned how to invest weight in various
rituals. This can lead to viewing all rituals as equally important or equally superficial. This leads to the
second part of the problem. In “Life-Cycle Events, Civil Ritual and the Christian,” in *Liturgy and Human
Passage*, eds. David Power and Luis Maldonado (New York: Crossroad, 1979), 14-24, Fr. Kavanagh
explains, “God is not bound to the sacramental order,” 14. Civil ritual is important, and culture will always
impact religious ritual, but we have sought to align many of our rituals too closely to the civic/social. This
leads to the inability to distinguish importance.
place of therapy and self-help is a Church whose ritual has been undermined. The ritual of liturgy is “by nature conservative and resistive to change.” While Fr. Kavanagh notes that liturgies do change over time, they are most resistant to external, rapid change.

His purpose in reflecting on the style of liturgy is to reinforce the relationship between all aspects of ritual and the state of the Church. When he writes that homilies should be about the gospel of the day, that the audible parts of the liturgy actually be audible and each part done by the appropriate minister or by the assembly, or that while the liturgy is formative, it is not about education, he does so to safeguard against the kinds of changes that may have a negative effect on the nature of the Church itself. This is related to his criticism of certain changes enacted by the Second Vatican Council.

It is easy to draw the importance of the connection between liturgy, ecclesiology, sacrament and ritual from Fr. Kavanagh’s work. It is also easy to see that he writes on these topics to critique current aspects of contemporary liturgy. It is possible to both agree and disagree with these criticisms. On the one hand, it has been the experience of many a member of the Church to witness an uninspired and uninspiring liturgy. As mentioned above, the notion that good liturgy may lead one to the edge of chaos would shock many a devout Catholic. The idea that one was meant to take something from liturgy and allow it to influence one outside of Church is still difficult for many to understand. The popular understanding that attendance at Mass is an obligation, not a source of worship and thanksgiving meant to renew and reconfirm faith, remains partly because of our experience with very mundane liturgies.

67 Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 35.
68 Ibid., 26.
69 Ibid., 23.
70 Ibid., 28.
On the other hand, there certainly has been much work done in recent years to make the connection between Sunday and our lives as Christians for the rest of the week. Liturgies have gotten longer; homiletics is taught to future priests. Singing has become a larger part of Mass and there is evidence of a ‘less is more’ philosophy in the planning of liturgies which are in line with the types of suggestions Fr. Kavanagh makes in *Elements of Rite*. While these observations are anecdotal, and while Fr. Kavanagh’s critique is valid when put into historical perspective, he still stresses the importance of the liturgy, even in its truncated form, as *theologia prima*. As he notes, the liturgy was the power that adapted pagan cultures to Christianity. “Urban liturgy was…the anvil on which this was being pounded out with the help and participation of all sorts and conditions of Christians at the time, for they corporately were, *and remain*, the agent of the liturgical act. And what they shape is not mere ceremony. It is an enacted ecclesiology, a realized eschatology.”

Liturgy and worship are the foundation of the Church and of its theology. It is a lived and living enterprise.

The path to understanding the key concepts of liturgy, ecclesiology, sacrament and ritual from Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective has circled back several times. Liturgy is *theologia prima*, and the Church doing World. Ecclesiology is not the secondary reflection on the nature of the Church but, rather, the action of liturgy and worship done by the Church. It is the logical outcome of faith that Christians should gather as Church in worship. Sacrament is the language of the Church and the font of symbols. It keeps the meanings of our creations in check because of its Gospel-inspired, inverse perspective. Finally, ritual is one of the key components to our own humanity, and assists us in finding meaning in the World. It is also the language of liturgy. It makes the

71 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 67. (Italics mine)
actions of worship understandable and assists in both the preservation and growth of the liturgy.

Liturgy is the tie between these concepts, but it is not just one concept among the four. Liturgy is made from the interaction of all these parts, and is also an overriding guide that makes these concepts understandable. “Hence liturgy is not just ritual, not just a cult, not just the worship we offer God. It is first of all God’s coming to us in Christ. The commonly heard contemporary complaint, ‘I don’t go to church because I don’t get anything out of it,’ the summit of selfish narcissism…shows how little this is understood.”72 The correct understanding of liturgy presented here by Robert Taft is one of the reasons that Fr. Kavanagh insists that liturgy is theologia prima. Theologia prima and its relation to the Church constitute the fullness of Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology.

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CHAPTER III
UNPACKING AIDAN KAVANAGH’S LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

While the fullness of Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology may be gleaned indirectly from the previous chapters, this chapter will be devoted to a direct exploration of this theology. However, the notion of ‘direct exploration’ is tricky. Trying to explain Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of liturgy must take into account the fact that liturgy cannot be held down and examined merely through scientific analysis. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is richly circular and filled with examples rather than definitions, because the liturgy itself is a dynamic phenomenon. As mentioned before, liturgy is an active and enacted, lived experience of the Church gathering in worship of the living God. “…Christian liturgy is to express in a ritual moment that which should be the basic stance of every moment of our lives.”¹ Terms such as ‘worship’ and ‘liturgy’ encompass more for Fr. Kavanagh than just events on any given Sunday. They represent the quality of life in which Christians are born through baptism. Robert Taft also notes, “[L]iturgy is not one of the many things the Church does. It is its very life.”² The Christian’s worship is intimately connected to the Church’s survival. This is one reason why Fr. Kavanagh stands as a necessary critic of liturgical changes through history that have impact on the Church’s continued survival.

Given the importance of the liturgy from this perspective, this chapter will attempt to explore liturgy as theologia prima and its connection to ecclesiology. This task can only be done by connecting the two through Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of rite. Next, this chapter will look at the ‘tag’ lex orandi…lex credendi and how it

² Ibid., 41.
represents the relationship between primary and secondary theology. This includes greater explanation of the importance of liturgical theology and the role of the liturgical theologian. As Alexander Schmemann notes, the study of liturgics is in the midst of a much needed revival following the rise of dogmatic theology in the middle ages.³ “It is a return from the pietistic and individualistic understanding of worship to worship once more conceived as the eternal self-revelation of the Church.”⁴ This section will also highlight Schmemann’s historical rendering of how privatization entered the Church early in her history.

Finally, this chapter will explore the way culture impacts liturgy. For Fr. Kavanagh, one of the most serious changes in liturgy happened when the liturgy began to be seen as text instead of ritual. His work delves deep into history to show how this phenomenon grew. It is easy to witness the phenomenon of deritualization in our own Sunday liturgies when we see heads bowed in reading and not necessarily in prayer. Deritualization is but one criticism that Fr. Kavanagh has for the contemporary liturgy. Most of his critique centers on the way the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council was enacted in the American Church. One of the solutions he sees lies in a better understanding of Christian formation and initiation.

**Theologia Prima and Ecclesiology**

As noted in the previous chapter, Fr. Kavanagh’s basic understanding of liturgy is that it is *theologia prima*. The liturgy that takes the Church regularly to the edge of chaos causes deep change in the lives of those who participate. This change will then affect

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⁴ Ibid., 12.
their next liturgical act.⁵ “To detect that change in the subsequent liturgical act will be to discover where theology has passed…I hold that it is theology being born, theology in the first instance.”⁶ The adjustment is the place of theology and is theology itself; the adjustment is *theologia prima*. Fr. Kavanagh expresses this primordial theology in terms of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The thesis is the assembly gathered in liturgy; the antithesis is the changed condition caused by the liturgy; the synthesis is the adjustment to the change.⁷ “The adjustment comprises whole sets of acts great and small, conscious and unconscious, all of which add up to a necessarily critical and reflective theology which is architectonic for the content and significance of the assembly’s address to reality itself.”⁸ The reality that the assembly addresses is not only the next liturgical act, but also its relationship to the world outside of the church.

This adjustment/theology is also responsible for the gradual evolution of liturgical rites described by Schmemann.⁹ These changes are so small as to be almost imperceptible to those participating in the liturgy. Despite this, Fr. Kavanagh equates this change with theology in its first form. He notes that it is odd for us to think of theology in this manner. We have for centuries considered theology “something done in academies out of books by elites with degrees producing theologies of this and that.”¹⁰ We have confused *theologia secunda* as *theologia prima*. We have not perceived the difference between liturgical theology and a theology of the liturgy, the difference between the inside view of liturgy and the outside view of liturgy in the introduction.

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⁵ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 73.
⁶ Ibid., 74.
⁷ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 76.
⁸ Ibid.
The outsider view of secondary theology, and confusing it for primary theology, has made it difficult for us to catch \textit{theologia prima} in action. “For this reason, it is far easier for us to write and react to theologies of the liturgy than to perceive liturgical theology as it occurs and factor its results wisely for the life of the world.”\textsuperscript{11} This inability to perceive \textit{theologia prima} has important implications for the role of the Church in relation to the world.

Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence on liturgy as \textit{theologia prima} is founded not only on his own experience of and research into the liturgy but also upon the works of other theologians who make the same connection. Most assuredly, Fr. Kavanagh’s own theology is indebted to the work of Schmemann. It may be Fr. Kavanagh’s wit that makes his elucidations more approachable, but both learned theologians begin from the premise that liturgy is primary theology.

In his book, \textit{Theologia Prima}, David Fagerberg, who studied under Fr. Kavanagh at Yale, refers to Schmemann’s work in liturgical theology as “pioneering.”\textsuperscript{12} Fagerberg himself is quite the disciple of the insider view of liturgy (liturgical theology) as opposed to the outsider view (theology of liturgy). Using the analogy of language to explain this view of liturgy, Fagerberg agrees with Fr. Kavanagh that the current priority of secondary theology is misplaced. “Similarly, it is possible to be an intelligent theologian even if one is not an academic theologian. The academic theologian may be of regular help to the liturgical community, but there is a priority here, too, that should not be denied.”\textsuperscript{13} If

\textsuperscript{11} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 77.
\textsuperscript{12} Fagerberg, “The Pioneering Work of Alexander Schmemann,” in \textit{Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology}? In an endnote for this chapter, Fagerberg relates an independent study with Fr. Kavanagh in which they read together everything Schmemann had written. He notes that this experience not only influenced his own work, but was directly influential on Fr. Kavanagh’s book \textit{On Liturgical Theology}.
\textsuperscript{13} Fagerberg, \textit{Theologia Prima}, 3.
liturgy is language, the actual ‘speaking’ of the language/liturgy takes priority over the secondary study of language that a grammarian (academic theologian) might pursue.

Schmemann himself expresses this with much force when refuting the minimized role of liturgical theology in the theology of the Scholastics. “The accepted doctrine of the Church sees in ‘the tradition of sacraments and sacred rites’ an inviolable element of Tradition, and thus also one of the sources which theology must utilize if it seeks to expound fully the faith and life of the Church…theology as a whole cannot do without the science of liturgics.”¹⁴ What Schmemann calls leitourgia, and what Fr. Kavanagh and Fagerberg call theologia prima, is the ontological condition for all theology of both the primary and secondary sort.¹⁵ There can be no theology without the act of the worshiping assembly gathering to engage in the liturgy.¹⁶ This definition of liturgy provides a corrective for the Scholastic inversion of primary and secondary types of theology. All three authors agree that this inversion has led to a weakening of liturgical practice and a ‘dumbing down’ of pastoral theology. “Our aphasic ineptitude with liturgical theology as theologia prima may also be why our pastoral theology is often so remotely pastoral and so genially untheological, quite unlike the theology practiced by the Church fathers…it was a theology preached from within or in close connection with the liturgy rather than taught systematically in classrooms.”¹⁷ He notes also that the

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¹⁴ Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 15.
¹⁵ See Fagerberg, Theologia Prima, 75; and Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 75. Citing Schmemann, “liturgy…‘is not an authority or a locus theologicus; it is the ontological condition of theology’…(it is) simply the church caught in the act of being most overtly itself.”
¹⁶ See Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 78. “For if theology as a whole is critical reflection upon the communion between God and our race…then scrutiny of the precise point at which this communion is most overtly deliberated upon and celebrated by us…would seem to be crucial to the whole enterprise.”
¹⁷ Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 77-78.
Eastern Church has been able to keep this view of liturgy as *theologia prima* “as the basic way of doing theology.”\(^\text{18}\)

This connection to Schmemann’s assertion of liturgy as the ontological condition for theology leads Fr. Kavanagh to add a new dimension to his definition of *theologia prima*. *Theologia prima* is no longer only the change experienced in the worshiping assembly, it is liturgy itself. “A liturgical act is a theological act of the most all-encompassing, integral, and foundational kind.”\(^\text{19}\) He summarizes this position well by stating, “The claim is that a liturgical act is the act of primary theology *par excellence*, the act from which other acts of secondary theology take their rise within that life of right worship we call…the Church.”\(^\text{20}\) Fr. Kavanagh can make this claim because liturgy talks about God, and as Schmemann notes, “theology is above all explanation, ‘the search for words appropriate to the nature of God’, i.e. for a system of concepts corresponding as much as possible to the faith and experience of the Church.”\(^\text{21}\) Liturgy talks about God not in terms of a memorial, but as being liturgically present.\(^\text{22}\) The theological search for an explanation of God can find no greater source than in the action in which God becomes present. The change that is the birth of theology is a God-induced change. The liturgy that is theology *par excellence* is so because God is present to the Church in the liturgy.

As noted above and in the previous chapter, despite some Western scholars’ assertion that the Eastern Church has been able to keep the correct focus on the primacy

\(^{18}\) Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 78. Note that Schmemann might not necessarily agree with this assessment. He also feels that the Eastern Church’s liturgy and theology went through early accretions and was influenced (detrimentally) by Scholasticism. A good example of this is the final chapter of *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, “The Byzantine Synthesis.”

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 96.


\(^{22}\) Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima*, 81.
of liturgy, Schmemann feels that the liturgy of the East has faced similar ruptures.\textsuperscript{23} “And indeed at first glance everything can appear to be just as it should be. Our Church remains a liturgical Church \textit{par excellence}.”\textsuperscript{24} He notes; however, that the Church has become “exclusively liturgical, has been reduced to worship and worship alone.”\textsuperscript{25} Reverence for the Church has come to mean reverence for the Church building; worship has been equated with experience of beauty, and all this has led to a restricted sense of worship that has less to do with the Church gathering in communion to celebrate as it does with personal religious experience. While the ancient liturgy of the East may be uninterrupted, the purpose of liturgy as perceived by the faithful and the meaning ascribed to it sound similar to Fr. Kavanagh’s criticism that liturgy has become about individual self-help.

Given the large influence Schmemann’s thought had on Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology, it is worth exploring more of Schmemann’s assessment of these issues. Three points of Schmemann’s are especially salient. First, Schmemann notes that the relationship between worship and Church has been inverted. “The fact is that worship has ceased to be understood as a function of the Church. On the contrary, the Church herself has come to be understood as a function of worship.”\textsuperscript{26} This is in a way, similar to the inversion of \textit{lex orandi, lex credendi} as highlighted by Fr. Kavanagh, but at an even deeper level. Schmemann explains that at its core, the Church and worship are fused because worship is the purpose of the Church as “the highest and fullest expression and

\textsuperscript{23} Schmemann, \textit{Introduction to Liturgical Theology}, 22.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 23.
fulfilment (sic) of her nature...her knowledge of and communion with God.”  

Worship realizes and expresses the Church and the Church itself is nothing other than the Kingdom of God and the promise of the Kingdom yet to come.  “Having ceased to be the expression of the Church, worship has also ceased to be the expression of the Church in relation to the world.” This understanding of Church and worship, that worship is an expression of the Church and its fulfillment, is missing in contemporary approaches.

Church and worship have merged to the extent that the Church “has come to be understood as a sacramentally hierarchical institution existing for the performance of divine worship seen as a sacred, supra-temporal, immutable mystery.” Essentially, outside of the mystery of worship, there is no Church. Church has become subordinate to worship. This has led the second problem in Eastern liturgy, the individualization of worship. As noted in Chapter two, Schmemann rightly insists that there can be no private worship in the Church. Knowledge of (and communion with) God in worship and in assembling as the foretaste of the Kingdom can only be done corporately. Fr. Kavanagh makes this point by noting, “the liturgy is not some thing separate from the church, but simply the church caught in the act of being most overly itself as it stands faithfully in the presence of the One who is both object and source of that faith.” The Church gathers together in worship to be itself, to ‘do’ the world as it was meant to be done. The assembly constitutes the Church.

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28 Schmemann, Kavanagh and Fagerberg each express the eschatological dimension of the Church that seems to missing in contemporary theologies. This aspect of Church will be addressed later in this chapter.
30 Ibid., 24.
31 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 75.
The inversion of the relationship between worship and Church has led to a misperception on the part of the individual believer. “(He) does not feel he is a participant and celebrant of worship, does not know that…he, along with the others who…are constituting the Church, is called to express the Church as new life and to be transformed again into a member of the Church. He has become an ‘object’ of worship, it is celebrated for his ‘nourishment’, so that he may as an individual satisfy his ‘religious needs’."

Roger Haight views this from the perspective of the theology of grace. “The priority of grace, its gratuitous and a priori character relative to human existence itself…means that those who are impelled to liturgical worship are already cooperating with the impulses of grace in their lives.”

Worship has become something which is mysterious and beyond reality and has in turn led to viewing the Church as being only a human construct. The rightful view that worship and Church converge, that a graced people assemble to share this grace with one another and to make the reality of God’s kingdom accessible to the temporal order has been replaced with a view that the Church exists to cater to human needs. This not only leads to the privatization of sacraments as noted in Chapter two, but it makes it difficult for the believer to realize that through liturgy they are given direct access to the Source of everything.

The third and final part of Schmemann’s assessment that is relevant here is the way the inversion of worship and Church lead to a misunderstanding of the role of cult. Cult in the ancient religious world had the function of mediating the holy and the sacred to humanity and the temporal order. While Fr. Kavanagh does not go into a deep explanation of cult’s role, he implied this element in his theology in insistence that the

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32 Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 24.
liturgy is the Church ‘doing’ world. The Church exists in the real order because the real order has been saved and redeemed in Christ. This view is supported by Schmemann’s explanation of the way cult is related to Christianity. His Introduction to Liturgical Theology, traces the historical development of the liturgy in an effort explain how the aforementioned problems entered into the Eastern Liturgy. He addresses the development of the liturgy out of Judaism, and through a period of what he calls “liturgical dualism.”34 The early Christian communities continued in synagogue and Temple worship at the same time they realized that “Jesus was the Christ; the Messiah; the One in whom all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled.”35 The Hebrew cult had been fulfilled in Christ. It was still valid not because it continued to mediate the sacred to the real, but because out of it came the reality of the Messiah.

His analysis of the history of liturgy also includes the relationship of the Christian cult to the Greco-Roman pagan cult. He describes the pagan cult as mysteriological and explains that the Christian cult (fulfillment of the Hebrew cult) took on a similar role in relation to paganism. “In the broadest terms mystery or mysteriological piety can be defined as a faith in cult, in its saving and sanctifying power…the myth plays a secondary role and is wholly subordinated to the cult and disclosed in the cult.”36 The early Christian Church did not assume the role of new mediator of mystery, and he notes that the Church set itself in opposition to such a role. Again, the reason is that “Christianity was preached as a saving faith and not as a saving cult. In it the cult was not an object of faith but its result.”37 Christian cult is then the inversion of cult from a Hebrew and

34 Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 47.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 83.
37 Ibid.
pagan perspective. The Christian cult does not sanctify its individual members, but brings them together as the Body of Christ, “the manifestation of the Church as new life in the New Aeon.”\footnote{Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 84.} Individual members of the Church do not need to be sanctified because they are a saved and redeemed people through Jesus Christ. The mysteries do not need to be mediated because God has entered the real order. The early Christian cult was then cult like no other.

Schmemann asserts that this correct understanding of cult began to erode after two historical developments in the Eastern Church. The first was the legitimization of Christianity under Constantine and the change in piety when it assimilated the mysteriological cults and the disconnection of symbol with the real. As Taft notes, the time after Constantine was a time quick liturgical development. What had once been a “loose collection of individual local churches…evolved into a series of intermediate structures or federations.”\footnote{Taft, Beyond East and West, 167.} This led to a standardizing of Church practice which helped the Church fulfill its role in the state.

The second development had to do with the incorporation of monasticism in the Church hierarchy. It should be noted that Schmemann sees both developments as happening organically, even if he feels that their culmination led to a misunderstanding of the role of Christian liturgy. “Early monasticism must be defined as ‘private’ in the sense that it did not begin as an establishment or institution of the Church.”\footnote{Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 103.} Early monks certainly never set themselves in opposition to the Church. Despite the idealism placed on their separation, they still considered themselves members of the Church and gathered with the Church, when able, for worship. This changed as monasticism grew. The life of
individual prayer began to be seen as the ideal way for Christians to live. This combined with monks becoming completely separate from the worshipping Church. “We have seen that originally the norm was the participation of the monks in the Church’s Eucharist…the novelty of monastic private Communion lay in the fact that it was precisely piety or a particular experience of the Christian life which caused it…without being noticed the receiving of Communion was subordinated to individual piety, so the piety was no longer determined by the Eucharist.”

Corporate worship as the act of manifesting the Kingdom of God in the world became secondary to receiving Communion. The Eucharist became an instrument of piety.

These three points from Schmemann only scratch the surface of his assessment of the evolution of liturgy, but they do well to explain how even the ancient liturgy of the East has fallen victim to individualization and privatization in worship. Referring to the monastic practices that influenced these changes, Schmemann notes, “But the principle which first appeared in them remained: the view of Communion as an ascetical activity—as an individual act related to the individual needs or private spiritual state of the believer.”

The liturgy that Fr. Kavanagh refers to as “self-help” is rooted in the private piety fed through stressing the individualism of monasticism with an inversion of the newness of the Christian cult based in faith and assurance that the divine has entered into our reality with the notion that the sacred must be mediated through cult. It is more difficult to see liturgy as the corporate act which constitutes the Church in praise and worship the God made human, than as the way in which an individual Christian can be assured of individual salvation. Taft refers to this as “contemporary narcissism regarding

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41 Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 110.
42 Ibid., 150.
When presented with the complaint that people don’t ‘get anything out of church’ he counters, “What one ‘gets out of it’ is the inestimable privilege of glorifying God.” We seem to have forgotten this.

The historical importance of the liturgy and its development is crucial for Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of theologia prima. Liturgy is nothing more and nothing less than the Church gathered to worship. Such a fundamental truth was noted recently in Sacramentum caritatis.

If we consider the bimillenary history of God's Church, guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we can gratefully admire the orderly development of the ritual forms in which we commemorate the event of our salvation. From the varied forms of the early centuries, still resplendent in the rites of the Ancient Churches of the East, up to the spread of the Roman rite; from the clear indications of the Council of Trent and the Missal of Saint Pius V to the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council: in every age of the Church's history the eucharistic celebration, as the source and summit of her life and mission, shines forth in the liturgical rite in all its richness and variety.

Pope Benedict XVI not only notes the evolution of liturgy, but also frames the correct context for understanding the liturgy. It is foundational and natural to the Church’s kerygmatic role. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Church presupposes faith. Faith in the living God expresses itself in corporate worship, as God is the Source of worship. Corporate worship and the changes that the Church experiences in this process lead to a growing, evolving liturgy that is guided by the experience of God. The change, and liturgy itself, is theology in its primordial state, and the source of all secondary reflection on the liturgy. Such a view of liturgy requires a very specific, and in the end...
very simple, ecclesiology. The Church is that which is assembled to ‘do’ the liturgy; to be the Church ‘doing’ world.

It was previously noted that Fr. Kavanagh’s ecclesiology can be considered as being “from the pews.” While this is true, this type of ecclesiology cannot be confused as being egalitarian in the fullest sense. In his book, Elements of Rite, Fr. Kavanagh clearly notes that the liturgy, and therefore the Church, is ordered hierarchically and each member is responsible for completing their liturgical responsibilities. When finishing his description of liturgy as theologia prima, he notes that this type of theology is different from secondary theology not only because it is the source of secondary theology, but because “it is proletarian in the sense that it is not done by academic elites; it is communitarian in the sense that it is not undertaken by the scholar alone in his study; and it is quotidian in the sense that it is not accomplished occasionally but regularly throughout the daily, weekly, and yearly round of the assembly’s life of public liturgical worship.” The proletarian and communitarian aspects of liturgy are essential to the view of Church as being those who assemble in worship, rather than the centralized authority which regulates this action.

Schmemann speaks of this type of inversion and its effect on both liturgy and ecclesiology by reminding us of the triunity between assembly, Eucharist and the Church. This relationship was self-evident to the early Church, but has become clouded through the abstractions of Scholasticism. It is of no small import that the first chapter

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46 Kavanagh, Elements of Rite, 45.
47 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 89.
48 Schmemann, The Eucharist, 12.
49 Note that both Kavanagh and Schmemann equate Scholasticism with the theological and liturgical developments of the Middle Ages. Some of the developments that they find damaging to the liturgy include the practices that change the relationship between the people and the liturgy. Cf. Theodor Klauser, A Short History of the Western Liturgy, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 96-106. Without
of his final work (published posthumously) *The Eucharist*, is “The Sacrament of the Assembly.” “[A]ll early evidence…points to the fact that the gathering or assembly…was always considered the first and basic act of the eucharist—the ‘presider’…was to stand at the head of the assembly as the ‘president of the brethren.’ Thus, the assembly is the first liturgical act of the eucharist, its foundation and beginning.” He refers to this practice as the original understanding of the term ‘concelebration’. Ancient liturgical rite is built on the importance of the assembly gathered in liturgical celebration. Taft refers to this by saying that the “[l]iturgy is liturgy, the common service of the People of God.” He critiques the Western Church calling it “Scholasticism” Klauser notes that between 1073 and 1545, many of these practices became standard in the liturgy. Some of the more problematic practices include reciting the Canon in a whisper, the private/silent mass and religious individualism that led to extra-liturgical devotions. According to Klauser, there was a confluence of events that led to these developments. “From Gregory VII (1073-85) onwards, the popes took firmly into their own hands once more that task of leadership in the realm of the Roman liturgy which for almost three hundred years they had left to rulers and bishops on the northern side of the Alps,” (94). Unifying the Roman Rite included adding practices that had also been growing in monasteries. Citing the growth in the number of priests entering monasteries, Klauser explains, “The priest-monks naturally felt the need to exercise the office for which they had been ordained…The situations and tendencies we have just described led of necessity to the creation of the daily private mass,” (103). These practices were continued in the Tridentine reforms, a period Klauser refers to as “Rigid Unification in the Liturgy and Rubricism,” (117). It was not until the end of this period that liturgical reform began to take the shape of the reforms taught during the Second Vatican Council. “After the end of the First World War, the newly awakened interest in liturgy faced expression on the one hand in an ever-increasing demand for more research into the history of the liturgy, and on the other hand in the desire of the faithful to be instructed in liturgical matters,” (122). Fr. Kavanagh, whose own theological education happened during this time, represents this attitude towards that liturgy. Despite his later, pessimistic attitude towards some of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, his own liturgical theology reflects the importance of the role of the faithful in the liturgy itself. In this way, he is representative of the trend of rejecting the changes to the liturgy that came out of the Middle Ages and Scholasticism, and towards reclaiming the history of liturgical practice and a return to understanding the liturgy of the ancient Church.

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51 Ibid., 17-19. Schmemann highlights the responsorial nature of Eucharistic prayers and the importance of the assembly’s ‘amen’ in finalizing these aspects of worship. The assembly is the active participant in the celebration of the Eucharist.
52 Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 42.
for privatizing so many aspects of liturgy and for removing priests from the community at worship.\textsuperscript{53}

This proletarian, communitarian and quotidian act of liturgy is nothing less than the Church living its life as graced by God. Living the life of liturgy is Church, worship, belief and prayer, but it is also rite. “Rite can be called a whole style of Christian living found in the myriad particularities of worship, of laws called ‘canonical’, of ascetical and monastic structures, of evangelical and catechetical endeavors, and in particular ways of doing secondary theological reflection.”\textsuperscript{54} Liturgy, its enactment, produces rite; rite continually evolves as the liturgy evolves. This sentiment is found again in \textit{Sacramentum caritatis}. “Faith and the sacraments are two complementary aspects of ecclesial life…faith is expressed in the rite, while the rite reinforces and strengthens faith…The more lively the eucharistic faith of the People of God, the deeper is its sharing in ecclesial life in steadfast commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his disciples. The Church’s very history bears witness to this.”\textsuperscript{55} Rite, Christian living, reinforces faith.

Benedict goes on to note that all great reform in the Church has started from a rediscovery of the importance of Eucharistic rite. Fr. Kavanagh would explain this as Christians ‘doing’ the world as it was meant to be done.\textsuperscript{56} The loss of understanding rite as more than just empty ritual, thoughtless repetition, has everything to do with the loss of liturgy as \textit{theologia prima}.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 42. He gives an example of attending mass at a retreat and witnessing several priests saying their own private masses in side chapels. He also relates it to the brevity of Western liturgies and the proliferation of several times for Sunday worship.
\textsuperscript{54} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 100.
\textsuperscript{55} Pope Benedict, XVI, \textit{Sacramentum caritatis}, section 6.
\textsuperscript{56} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 100.
Fr. Kavanagh relates the loss of rite to the deritualization wrought by the textualization of the liturgy. That is, the experience of living the liturgy through rite and ritual gave way to sitting and reading the printed word. This topic is covered in detail later in this chapter, but note that he draws another connection between the liturgical changes brought about by the Reformation and the dissolution of liturgy. “A sense of rite and symbol in the West was breaking down and under siege.”

Biblical texts became the main source of the Church encountering the Word. “Liturgy had begun to become ‘worship’, and worship to become scripture’s stepchild rather than its home.” Again, this change helped to usher in the ascendency of secondary theology. Those who engaged in activities of textual criticism of the Bible, the academic elite, were given priority over the assembly gathered in liturgy and living theology.

To say the least, this view of liturgy was certainly not communitarian. “These people constituted the proletariat of the merely baptized who were expected to bring their study texts…with them and to sit, schoolroom fashion in rows of linotypical pews to be instructed by the knowing in the unknown.” The ascendancy of Scripture as a written text meant to establish the order of worship is contrary to the relationship between Scripture and liturgy in Church history. Fr. Kavanagh in no way suggests that the Christian Bible is less than liturgy, but like supplicandi and credendi, there is a properly ordered relationship that became inverted. “Such a discussion would have to begin by shedding our fixation with scripture as a text from which Christian liturgy somehow results as effect from cause. Short of this, it will not be possible to grasp the fact that before any books of the Christian Bible had been produced, Christian liturgy had already

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57 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 108.
58 Ibid., 109.
59 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology 110.
been not only conceived within the womb of Judaism but had also been born and had
grown into a vigorous youth. The acts that constituted the Church, Jesus’ Last Supper
and the events of Pentecost, were events of worship, not events of Scripture.

Taft’s assessment of the relationship between liturgy and Scripture may help to
further this point. The earliest Christian community had gathered together to share in the
Lord’s Supper, to sing hymns and psalms, to pray, long before these actions were written
down in Scripture. “For the Sitz im Leben of the Gospels is the historical setting not of
the original event, but of its telling during the early years of the primitive Church.” The
act of telling was done liturgically, when the faithful assembled for worship. “For it is in
the liturgy of the Church, in the ministry of word and sacrament, that the biblical pattern
of recapitulation of all in Christ is returned to the collectivity and applied to the
community of faith that will live in him.” When these events were committed to
writing, both Scripture and liturgy informed one another and created the style of Christian
life that Fr. Kavanagh calls rite.

One final note on rite in relation to Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology is that the
problems with understanding liturgy as theologia prima expounded on above have moved
the liturgy from “being of God to being about God.” “The Church's ability to ‘make’
the Eucharist is completely rooted in Christ's self-gift to her.” This truth can often seem
lost when the liturgy’s role is viewed from an individualistic, therapeutic mindset.
Liturgy about God sees secondary concerns like doctrinal education as being more
important than gathering in the Source of the Church, and in the Sources’ Name. This is

60 Ibid., 111.
61 Taft, Beyond East and West, 6.
62 Ibid., 5.
63 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 116.
64 Pope Benedict, XVI, Sacramentum caritatis, section 14.
the cause of the breakdown of rite. Education done for ideological ends does not understand the necessity of rite, and so rite leaves the liturgy. However, this loss of rite does not mean that humanity does not need rite; rite’s proper role as living the life of the Church in its Source is taken over by other human creations. “Rite’s surrogate becomes civil religion filtered somewhat, softened somewhat, by a generally benign middle-class liberalism in danger of becoming defensive, inbred, and infertile because it is no longer brought into vigorous confrontation with the Gospel but has become the only way in which the Gospel is to be understood. The Church becomes a clergy support group.”

This constitutes Fr. Kavanagh’s concern over the state of the Church which is highlighted in the next section.

To conclude this section on ecclesiology and liturgy, time should be spent on their eschatological nature. The Church’s understanding of itself is that it has a specific role in God’s plan in history. This is the Church ‘doing’ the world. As Monika Helwig notes, “the Church does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the coming reign of God in the whole human community and in all creation.” The Church has an eschatological dimension and responsibility. The liturgy may seem to be about the memorializing of a specific historical event but, “liturgy’s deep structures always betray the continuing awareness of the faithful that the One in whose presence they stand is beyond time and time’s end…Thus even when the liturgy of Christians deals with time…it does so not in the short term but…eschatologically.” Taft explains this as the past event being ever present in God. “What the New Testament adds to this is the startling message that

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‘god’s time’ has been fulfilled in Christ…the fullness of time. What distinguishes it is its completeness, its *pleroma*; what is inaugurated is…a new quality of life."68  This is part of the graced life of the assembly and startling relation the Church has with the world.

The liturgy’s eschatological dimension acts as one of the guides that allows Fr. Kavanagh to stress its primacy as theology *par excellence*. Its connection to eschatology is about its survival.69  Liturgy is done not only in the present, but with a view to the ultimate future “which is already being worked out in them by God’s grace and their own cooperation with that grace by faith and works.”70  Schmemann ties this to understanding the Eucharist, and with it the liturgy and the Church, as the Sacrament of the Kingdom.71  The beginning of the Eucharist is the assembling of the church and its end is sitting at “the table of Christ, in his kingdom.”72  This eschatological dimension of Church and liturgy is one that many contemporary liturgical events fail to make clear.73  According to Schmemann, the understanding of eschatology itself has changed. “It is characteristic that our scholarly tomes of dogmatic theology…speak of the kingdom in quite sparing, dull and even boring terms. Here, eschatology…is virtually reduced to the doctrine of ‘God as the Judge and Avenger’,”74 reinforcing yet again an individualistic piety. Yet, this is precisely what the Church and her liturgy are; they are the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into temporal reality. For Fr. Kavanagh, the eschatological dimension of the Church is the primary reason that the liturgy is *theologia prima*. It is worship of a particular nature; it is past, present and future.

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68 Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 3.
70 Ibid., 143.
72 Ibid.
73 Schmemann again credits Scholastic theology and its abstraction of liturgy for this problem, particularly for narrowing the importance of Eucharist to the act of consecration and ignoring other aspects.
74 Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 42.
Lex Orandi...Lex Credendi

Liturgy and ecclesiology are essentially co-terminous. Where the assembly gathers in liturgical worship, there is the Church. “A Christian church does not merely use a liturgy; it is the liturgy by which it worships.”

To lose this fundamental connection and begin to see each as some type of theology that exists for reflection rather than action is to separate theology from its source and to lose the purpose of worship. Fr. Kavanagh describes this best when explaining why lex orandi, lex credendi must be considered more than just a tag. This tag is the truncated form of lex supplicandi legem statuat credendi, and the truncated form implies the two laws are interchangeable and that each can constitute the other. While Fr. Kavanagh agrees that the two are equal and identical, “[t]he agent of believing is no less communitarian than the agent of worship...Since the agency of both is the same, the results of that agency must be seen as identical rather than as disparate and opposable,” the verb statuat guarantees that the maxim is not a two-way street. Pope Benedict XVI notes that the connection between lex orandi and lex credendi must stress the primacy of liturgical action.

Statuat subordinates the law of belief to the law of worship; worship constitutes belief.

This is so because the Source of worship is God. “Belief is always consequent upon encounter with the Source of the grace of faith.” We do not worship because we believe; we believe because we meet the Source of our faith in the act of worship. “To reverse the maxim, subordinating the standard of worship to the standard of belief, makes a shambles of the dialectic of revelation. It was a Presence, not faith, which drew Moses

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75 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 97.
76 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 91.
77 Pope Benedict, XVI, Sacramentum caritatis, section 34.
78 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 91.
to the burning bush, and what happened there was a revelation, not a seminar.”\textsuperscript{79} God draws us to worship. God is the source of the liturgy, \textit{theologia prima}, and the worship of this Presence is what grounds our faith and belief. A final example of Fr. Kavanagh’s point is to understand the meaning of the sacrament of Baptism through its structure. He notes that, “the creeds and the reasoning which produced them are not the forces which produced baptism. Baptism gave rise to the trinitarian creeds.”\textsuperscript{80} Creeds are products of secondary theology, and while they may influence worship, they exist because of the action of worship done by the assembly responding to the presence of God. Baptism was born of worship, and the doctrine of the Trinity was born from the act of baptism.

Without saying that the assembly does not benefit from the insights of secondary theology, and from the authority that uses secondary theology in the making of doctrine, Fr. Kavanagh asserts that the Church engaged in the liturgical act of worship, experiencing change and adjusting to it, is self-regulated by grace. “It is this constantly modulating, self-critical, and reflective adjustment to God-wrought change…which constitutes the condition for doing all other forms of theology and of understanding the Word of God…It is the wellspring out of which the river of secondary theology arises…It is what liturgy enacts.”\textsuperscript{81} Unfortunately, the loss of the primacy of liturgy has led to many of the practices and conditions that Fr. Kavanagh criticizes. When liturgy loses its role as the primary and foundational act of the Church, when the assembly loses its communitarian role because of the influence of secondary theology, the liturgical

\textsuperscript{79} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 92.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 89-90.
assembly becomes theologically disenfranchised.\textsuperscript{82} This is the Church that Fr. Kavanagh criticizes as performing liturgies which are little more than therapeutic, self-help sessions.

Despite Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence on the foundational nature of \textit{lex orandi}, we cannot forget that it is still connected to the doctrine of the Church. “Theological reflection in this area can never prescind from the sacramental order instituted by Christ himself. On the other hand, the liturgical action can never be considered generically, prescinding from the mystery of faith. Our faith and the Eucharistic liturgy both have their source in the same event: Christ’s gift of himself in the Paschal Mystery.”\textsuperscript{83} Fr. Kavanagh explains that the liturgy, while primary, is guided by several canons that assure, as far as they may, “that the liturgy of Christians does not drift into delusion and fantasy but remains worship in Spirit and in truth.”\textsuperscript{84} Most important of these canons is the canon of Holy Scripture. The role of the Bible in contemporary liturgy is explored in depth below, but note that Fr. Kavanagh explains the importance of Scripture as being more than just a written text. “This canon governs what the assembly deems appropriate that it should read and hear as it stands before God in worship…the canon of holy scripture embraces written works not for their literary merit nor on the basis of the piety of their authors, but on the grounds of their being ‘of God’ rather than just ‘about God’.”\textsuperscript{85} Holy Scripture being ‘of God’ helps to ground the liturgy in the Pascal Mystery. Liturgy may be primary, but it is certainly not solitary.

The renewed understanding of the role of liturgy and \textit{lex orandi} can be considered a corrective to the types of problems that came out of Scholastic theology. Edward

\textsuperscript{82} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 90.
\textsuperscript{83} Pope Benedict, XVI, \textit{Sacramentum caritatis}, Section 34.
\textsuperscript{84} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 139-140.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 140.
Kilmartin notes that “liturgy is the most important place in which the Christian community expresses its nature.” Interestingly, while he does note that the liturgy has a unique role as the source of theology, he concludes that “Systematic theologians, working in all branches of theology should consider it a matter of the highest priority to show how their subjects can contribute to a better understanding and practice of communal worship.” While Fr. Kavanagh might echo this sentiment, he would also invert it and suggest that all systematic theologians allow themselves to be shaped more readily by the practice of communal worship.

Another important aspect of Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology is the role of the liturgical theologian. *Theologia prima* is difficult for secondary theologians and the academy to understand. As mentioned above, the liturgy resists being studied in a scientific manner for there is no general liturgy to be studied. “The fact is that liturgy in general does not exist in the real order…like all analogies, it is capable of obscuring real differences by the splendor of the sameness it provides.” Taft equates this to the gratuitous role of symbol. “It doesn’t mean *something*; it simply *means*.” To speak of liturgy or liturgies and compare them, one must speak of a concrete liturgical event. The role of the liturgical theologian is to study liturgy as it is enacted. This is most important when comparing liturgies. After finding the generalizations between traditions, the liturgical theologian must go beneath them, find the differences, and then find the real commonalities. Fr. Kavanagh explains that the Western theological tradition has tended

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87 Ibid., 105
89 Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 33.
to compartmentalize various types of theology, and has not recognized the central role of
liturgy as the practice of worship that founds these theologies.\textsuperscript{91}

Fr. Kavanagh’s view of the role of the liturgical theologian noted above is
indebted to the work of Robert Taft. Fr. Taft is a Jesuit priest ordained in the Russian rite
of the Byzantine Catholic Church. He brings a unique perspective to understanding the
differences between the Eastern and Western Church and has spent his academic career
exploring the history of liturgy.\textsuperscript{92} He refers to his method of studying liturgy as
‘structural’ and also compares it to the study of language. “Liturgies also have a common
‘deep structure’; they also operate and evolve according to certain common ‘laws’.”\textsuperscript{93}
When exploring the history of liturgy, Taft seeks out this structure instead of meaning.
“For in the history of liturgical development, structure outlives meaning. Elements are
preserved even when their meaning is lost…or when they have become detached from
their original limited place…acquiring new and broader meanings. And elements are
introduced which have no apparent relationship to others.”\textsuperscript{94} It is within the structure of
liturgy that one can find the commonalities of every evolving liturgy, and it is the
structure to which the liturgical theologian must pay heed.

Taft noted the importance of seeking structure rather than meaning, as meaning
changes over time. This is particularly important when trying to engage in a historical
study of liturgical change. Echoing Schmemann’s issues with Scholastic theology, Taft
points out that medieval commentators on the liturgy sought meaning over structure, and

\textsuperscript{91} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 78. This is an example of the influence of Scholastic theology that
Schmemann also finds damaging to liturgy.
\textsuperscript{92} Some of this information was found online at http://www.uscatholic.org/church/prayer-and-
Fr. Taft has a Facebook page.
\textsuperscript{93} Taft, \textit{Beyond East and West}, 152.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
these interpretations often did violence to structure. Fr. Kavanagh associates Taft’s point with Schmemann’s thesis over the meaning of symbol. “Beginning in the Middle Ages, commentators attended more to the ‘symbolic’ meaning of the various liturgical units…In the sixteenth century, these interpretations took on a particular theological and polemical cast among both Reformers and Catholics, a step which led quickly to a secondary theology officially defined as ‘correct’ now determining rather than interpreting liturgical text and form.” The understanding of structure was lost, and the new liturgies developed during this time broke free from the historical understanding of the Church gathering in worship.

According to Fr. Kavanagh, this led to a misinterpretation in the definition of orthodoxy. “The step was momentous because it confirmed many on both sides of the schism in a notion of orthodoxy not as a sustained life of ‘right worship’, but as ‘correct doctrine’ to be maintained by centralized ecclesiastical authority having exclusive power to enforce an absolute standard in liturgical texts by law.” No longer was liturgy seen as the ontological condition for all theology, or seen as theologia prima, it was now one of the elements of the Church that required validation and legitimization from Church authorities. As Fr. Kavanagh notes, orthodoxy as right worship, had begun to be confused for orthopistis, right believing, or othodidascalia, right teaching.

By charting the change in the way liturgy was perceived and studied in Scholastic theology, Fr. Kavanagh has laid the ground work for his critical assessment of contemporary liturgy. Having become unmoored from its rightful place in the center of

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95 Taft, Beyond East and West, 152.
96 Schmemann, The Eucharist, 37.
97 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 81.
98 Ibid., 81.
99 Ibid., 82.
the Church’s self-understanding, liturgics or liturgical theology, is but one of many ‘types’ of theology, and not always considered a very important one.\textsuperscript{100} This shift has also led to a devaluing of the role of liturgy. As opposed to being the basic function of the Church, the Church being most itself, its role has been denigrated. “The liturgy may be viewed as rather important, but mainly to the extent that it discharges a role of keeping a sense of Christian values alive in the community and remains an effective vehicle of transmitting the Christian vision of the Kingdom.”\textsuperscript{101} This is why the average churchgoer would be hard pressed to think of the liturgy as \textit{theologia prima}, and why, in an effort to establish the original role of the liturgy, Fr. Kavanagh points that the liturgy is neither a lecture nor an educational endeavor.\textsuperscript{102}

The approach to liturgy as being anything less than the fundamental purpose of the assembly of God leads to other shifts. As noted above, the ancient assertion \textit{lex supplicandi legem statuat credendi} is reversed by the inversion of primary and secondary theology. “Furthermore the liturgical assembly, which has been meeting under God fifty-two times a year for the past 2,000, now must be regarded as a theological cipher drawing whatever theological awareness it has not from its own response to its graced encounter with the living God, but from sources found in ecclesiastical bureaucracies and within the walls of academe.”\textsuperscript{103} This attitude and practice has direct implications for the ecclesiology of the Church. If, as Fagerberg points out, all of the faithful can be intelligent theologians even if they are not academic theologians, the faithful can draw their experience of theology from the experience of worship itself. This type of theology

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\textsuperscript{100} As noted above in Fr. Kavanagh’s take on pastoral theology.  \\
\textsuperscript{101} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 83.  \\
\textsuperscript{102} Kavanagh, \textit{Elements of Rite}, 57; 102.  \\
\textsuperscript{103} Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 83. 
\end{flushright}
has a priority over the secondary theology of professional theologians. If the role of secondary theology controls the worship of the Church, the assembly changes from active theologians to passive recipients of doctrine.

The role of the liturgical theologian as Fr. Kavanagh envisions it is to learn how individual liturgical acts ‘work’ not what they mean. So, if one were to set out to understand the liturgical act of baptism, one would “seek how liturgy ‘works’ in and from its ecclesial context, and how all liturgical acts…and all ecclesial contexts work on each other.”104 This requires looking at the individual act and comparing its structure to other liturgical acts and to the worshipping assembly. The root structure of baptism (as all liturgical acts) lies in the experience of liturgy as “the dwelling place of present and remembered encounter with the living God...What results from a liturgical act is not only ‘meaning’, but an ecclesial transaction with reality, a transaction whose ramifications escape over the horizon of the present, beyond the act itself, to overflow even the confines of the local assembly into universality.”105 This ecclesial transaction is theology. The transaction results in change; the changed assembly and its changed worship make it aware of the Source of liturgy and its own Source. “It is where church order, mission, morals, ministry, and theology are born.”106 The liturgical theologian’s job is to reclaim this role of liturgy and to right the inversion between primary and secondary theology.

The Issue of Culture

Much of the unpacking of Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology comes in the form of critique. He defines liturgy as theologia prima in relation to the changes in the liturgy

104 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 87.
105 Ibid., 87-88.
106 Ibid., 88.
that have obscured this basic aspect of the worship of the Church. This critique
necessarily takes a historic perspective. As noted in the previous chapter, liturgy has the
power to adapt culture to the Gospel. As enacted by people, liturgy is also subject to the
cultural understanding of those who worship. It should be noted that Fr. Kavanagh’s
critique of the liturgy has much to do with the way that culture has interpreted and
enacted the liturgy through history and into our own time. This has been hinted at in the
preceding paragraphs and will be spelled out below. The issues surrounding the cultural
interpretation of the liturgy are the phenomenon of deritualization, problems with the
implementation of Vatican II by the American Church, and a misunderstanding of
Christian initiation.

The deritualization of liturgy is one of Fr. Kavanagh’s primary critiques. The
levels to which the Western liturgy has been influenced by deritualization can be seen in
his criticism of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and its teaching on the repetitive
nature of ritual highlighted in the previous chapter. This is not a problem that he sees in
the Eastern churches and he connects this phenomenon partly with the Reformation. The
root of the problem of deritualization is the equation of the liturgy with texts rather than
with performance. “It is worth probing the roots of this attitude if for no other reason
than the effect it has in deritualizing, peripheralizing, and subordinating liturgy, the lex
supplicandi of Prosper of Aquitaine, to the lex credendi—a serious mutation that makes
worship a function of belief rather than its foundation and source.”107 The absorption
with the text leads to deritualization which, in turn, weakens the foundational role that
worship and liturgy have the life of the Church and theology. It is a self-perpetuating

107 Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 70.
cycle, and Fr. Kavanagh’s critique supports his theme of the proper relation between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*.

The problem with deritualization and with the inversion of the ‘tag’ mentioned above relates to Fr. Kavanagh’s second cultural critique, the implementation of the liturgical changes from Vatican II. This will be addressed in detail below, but as Fr. Kavanagh notes, “The liturgical changes of the Second Vatican Council were primarily of the Roman liturgy’s library…the new texts could easily be altered, but patterns of ritual performance, being habits that belong to congregations of participants, were not so malleable.”

Despite this fact, the texts did alter ritual performance, and not for the better. Richard Grimes notes, “Not only do some liturgists seem inherently tied to intellectual thematizing, they seem wed to direct, didactic statement. This gives the entire liturgy, especially the Liturgy of the Word, a didactic tone, which easily suffocates the role of the arts in liturgy.”

The rationality of liturgy, based on the importance of texts, has diminished the importance of and need for ritual. This didactic approach to liturgy needs to be countered by things such as stillness, silence, and serious meditative practice.

Fr. Kavanagh would also include the need for movement, not symbolic movement or interpretive movements as found through liturgical dance, but as Grimes puts it, “kinesthetic engagement with the liturgical…environment.”

The change in the liturgy changes the communitarian aspects of liturgy. Those who control the texts, the academic elite, control the liturgy; communal, ritual participation becomes less important than the text.

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110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
Deritualization in turn has led to demystification, and the reformed liturgy is in need of new types of ritual that build a sense of mystery. Richard Grimes notes, “There is indeed a noble simplicity in the new liturgy…nothing is hidden, nothing extra…There is something about focalized attention and trying too hard that causes worshipers to miss sideways glances that feed the unconscious.”\(^{112}\) This is perhaps why people feel the need to ‘get something out of’ mass. What has been demystified is the “living corporate mode throughout the rest of time and space of Christ’s personal enfleshment.”\(^{113}\) A deritualized and demystified liturgy does not feed the deeper need of communicating with the assembly and God, of actually gathering to become the Church. “[S]o much is aimed at eye and ear and so little at belly and foot.”\(^{114}\) To understand Fr. Kavanagh’s critique of this situation, it is necessary to explore the history of textualization and deritualization that he presents.

While a major source of the problem of textuality can be traced to the Reformation\(^ {115}\) Fr. Kavanagh points out that the seeds lay in Scholasticism and the new intellectualism of the twelfth century. “Interest in learning surged along with increasing leisure and literacy among the middle classes.”\(^ {116}\) The increase in literacy eventually led to the invention of the printing press. As Fr. Kavanagh notes, “A knowledge explosion had begun, information was cheaply disseminated, and texts could be quickly and easily changed.”\(^ {117}\) The accessibility to texts led to another novelty; the private relationship between the silent reader and the text. Add to this the translation of the Bible into the

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\(^ {113}\) Kavanagh, Elements of Rite, 85.
\(^ {115}\) Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 70. “[T]he reductionist attitude appears most clearly in some Reformation churches that have long embraced as part of their ideological foundation a reflection of sacramentalism and ritual in favor of dealing almost exclusively with the printed word.”
\(^ {116}\) Ibid., 72.
\(^ {117}\) Ibid.
vernacular, and one can see how the importance of the text as the Word of God began to influence the Western Church.

This is not to say that sacred texts were not and are not important to religious worship. Looking again to the Eastern Church, Fr. Kavanagh explains that use of sacred text supports and enhances ritual performance. “In the Byzantine liturgy, for example, sacred texts from the Bible often emerge as poetry.”¹¹⁸ The Biblical text becomes the conceptual home for the ritual act, but does not usurp the liturgical performance. The assembly is not expected to merely assent to the readings and think about them, but through the use of music and ritual gesture, repetition and response, they begin to feel and react in their whole persons to God’s Word. “To know God in this way, as it were on the skin, is far more central to religious experience than thinking correctly about God only between the ears. It is the difference between a kiss and a concept.”¹¹⁹ The truth of God which had been experienced as “a kind of enfolding embrace”¹²⁰ was now accessible through the skill of literacy; truth lay in the text.

Access to and focus on the text, particularly the Bible, led to a lessening of corporate worship. The Bible was no longer the text of ritual worship, the underscore of liturgical performance, but had become an object with which one was meant to have a personal relationship. The Bible began to be taken much more seriously than ritual.¹²¹ This opened the door to doctrine (as text) becoming that which established worship. Text, rational agreement and the ability to promulgate rules became the focus of the Church. “No patience was left for rich ambiguity and beauty in common performance,

¹¹⁸ Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 73.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 73.
¹²⁰ Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 104.
¹²¹ Ibid., 103.
and the highest form of liturgical art, that of ceremony, lapsed. Along the way people were taught to distrust the powerful repetition of ritual performance and to regard its symptoms as signs of an illness from which Christians must flee. Ritual allows us to know something without learning it through a text. The text may speak to our brains, but ritual speaks to our whole selves. “[I]f ritual does not feed the unconscious, then ideology and advertising will.” The loss of ritual in worship not only changed the communitarian aspect of worship, but it caused people to seek ritual from other sources.

Ritual is essential to human life. As noted in the previous chapter, Fr. Kavanagh expressed that ritual helps to order human society by communicating values and ethics. “Because of the crucial nature of the values it evokes and reinforces, ritual rises to the level of paradigm—anticipating change as well as inscribing order in the minds and hearts of its participants.” While noting that ritual cuts across all aspects of human existence, and that the Church does not have exclusive ownership of God and God’s presence, Fr. Kavanagh does stress that when religious ritual is lacking, civil/secular ritual will fill the void. “This is perhaps one reason why communities of Christians liturgically so undernourished find themselves overpowered by the awesome vigor of popular civil rituals, of secular aesthetic intensified in the entertainment media, and of the singular meaning one discovers for oneself in the life-crisis of birth-puberty-death.” The problem with this is that while these rituals can communicate God, they do not provide “sure and certain access” to God in the manner of the Church.

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122 Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 74.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
Textualization has also had a detrimental effect on the primary text of Christianity. Texts are things that can be manipulated and changed and when separated from its ritual enactment, the Gospel can become domesticated. Fr. Kavanagh refers to this as *embourgeoisement*, the domestication of the liturgy to middle class values. He reserves his most direct criticism of the reformed liturgy in America for his article published in *The Awakening Church: 25 Years of Liturgical Renewal*. Again, his criticism does not mark his belief that the reformed liturgy is ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’ but that its implementation has been problematic because of the history of liturgical understanding we have inherited. Many theologians contributed articles to this volume, which was based on a study of the enactment of the liturgy in various churches across the country. The essays presented are a combination of praise and criticism for the reformed rite, but the potential dangers of an American enculturation of the liturgy were noted by several theologians.

Fr. Kavanagh relates the problem of *embourgeoisement* to the Rite of Gathering. He notes that the liturgies studied for assessment lacked an understanding of the vertical nature of the liturgy. By focusing so much energy on the horizontal aspects of community and gathering, the liturgies seemed celebrate “American middle class” values. “To seek a vertical dimension in these liturgies may not be sufficiently

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126 See Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 116. “Rite’s surrogate becomes civil religion filtered somewhat, softened somewhat, by a generally benign middle-class liberalism in danger of becoming defensive, inbred, and infertile because it is no longer brought into vigorous confrontation with the Gospel but has become the only way in which the Gospel is to be understood. The Church becomes a clergy support group.”


130 This element of the liturgy has been changed and enhanced since the study conducted for the volume referenced.

nuanced, for it is one thing to try to generate a ‘sacral sense’ by gearing liturgical rites to symbols held sacred by the middle class, and quite another thing to attend upon the holiness of God, which transcends class, convicts of sin, and strips away illusion.”  

132 It may be suggested that one of the elements that leads to the horizontal focus in liturgy is the deritualization and demystification that supports a domestication of the Gospel.

Another problem with this focus on horizontal hospitality and community is that it comes off as being forced. “One has the distinct impression of a group trying too hard.”  

133 Whereas, a focus on communal spirit could have the effect of taking that community out into the assembly’s lives, communal spirit in liturgy seems to be an island of communal spirit that relieves the assembly’s guilt for “organizing the rest of their lives on the basis of individualistic, privatistic values.”  

134 Perhaps we try too hard to make ourselves into a community because the communal aspects of ritual and worship have been stripped from the liturgy. As Grimes notes, elements such as holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer or shaking hands during the sign of peace may point our deep desire for social contact, but as symbols they cannot bear the weight we invest in them.  

135 They are “formalized friendliness.”  

136 Fr. Kavanagh, warns that these attempts at community are in danger “of producing a ‘community’ that is less fundamentally Christian than it is a middle-class pocket of gentility and self-satisfaction.”  

137 This type of community is unconsciously self-selective and hostile to those who do not have the same values. This leads to a segregated, classist Church.

134 Ibid., 17.
135 Ibid., 22.
136 Ibid.
137 Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study…Liturgical History,” 90.
It was mentioned above that Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of liturgy is that it is communitarian, but not egalitarian from the perspective of hierarchy. This being said, the liturgy should have certain egalitarian aspects that cannot be supported by American middle-class values. While noting that he is a creature of Vatican II and believes the reformed liturgy is better than the Tridentine liturgy it replaced, the Church of that time seemed to be healthier due to the discipline of the liturgy. “We felt closer, therefore, to each other in our suffering.”\textsuperscript{138} The discipline and obligation of liturgy had an egalitarian effect on the assembly. This discipline allowed people to appreciate the mystery of the liturgy. Egalitarianism has been replaced by “committees made up of clergy and semiprofessional laypersons who represent largely middle-class values…of short-term joining and therapy, which may often be problematic for the poorer classes and disdained by the upper classes.”\textsuperscript{139} This American enculturation of the liturgy has led to the creation of a quasi-civil religion that does not represent the purpose of the Church as the manifestation of God’s reign on earth.

A final symptom of the \textit{embourgeoisement} of the liturgy is the way that contemporary worship ignores the important elements of asceticism and evangelical poverty. How many faithful have listened to homilies that attempt to explain that Jesus did not mean that his followers had to give up all of their possessions after listening to the Gospel story of the rich young man?\textsuperscript{140} This is an example of the domestication of the Gospel mentioned above, and it is rooted in the removal of the ascetical sense from the life of the Church. The importance of asceticism is rooted in the foundation of the Church in Christ. As Schmemann referenced above, the Christian Church broke the old

\textsuperscript{138} Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study…Liturgical History,” 93.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{140} Mark 10: 17-27. One is right to argue that this is exactly what Jesus meant.
understanding of cult by giving the faithful direct access to God through the liturgy founded in Christ. This access to God “must be called Eucharistic. The eucharist is, in fact, a state of being before it is a ritual pattern.”  

141 The Eucharistic way of being is ascetical.

Asceticism and evangelical poverty were considered the norm for all baptized Christians in the Early Church. Citing Basil of Cappadocia, Fr. Kavanagh notes, “For a Christian, baptism makes imperative through its death and rebirth imagery an evangelical poverty which Basil and much of the tradition after him, particularly in the East, regard as normal.”  

142 This departure from the normal way of Christian living can be traced to the period of Scholasticism. Without citing all of the cultural, social and historical events that led to increased wealth in the society of this time, it can be noted that the theology of this time tended to place this type of normal Christian living as belonging to the religious orders. In effect, this created two classes of Christians, the religious who might be called ‘real Christians’ because they seemed to live the full life of Christian baptism, and the ‘lay or secular Christian’ from whom not much was expected.  

143 An entire group of Christians were excluded from the rigors of evangelical poverty, asceticism and care for others. This reality could not but help to lead to the types of liturgical and worship practices that Fr. Kavanagh criticizes. Why should these Christians participate in liturgy or partake of Communion when they were living lives that were less than required by their baptism?

As Fr. Kavanagh notes, this tendency has begun to be addressed. He connects it to the reestablished Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The establishment of the

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141 Kavanagh, “Religious Life and Worship,” 197.
142 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 156.
143 Ibid.
catechumenate insists that they undergo a period of formation. “They must be set into a process of passage from what they have been to what they must become by baptism into Christ.”¹⁴⁴ This formation focuses on the normality of Christian living, and has helped to revive the understanding that this living is the result of baptism. “The fact remains, however, that what we have come to regard in many different ways as a theology of religious life was for Basil the Great…simply a consequence of everyone’s baptism, and the specialties of later religious orders were originally the rights and property of all the baptized.”¹⁴⁵ The baptized Christian is both of the world and separated from the world. This is why Fr. Kavanagh insists the liturgy is the Church doing the world. “[T]he worship done by the baptized (is) something not of this world;”¹⁴⁶ through liturgy, the Church does the world as it was meant to be done. This is why asceticism is so important to the lives of Christians.

Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of asceticism is that it is more than denial and self-punishment. Rather, it is a type of life that embodies orthodoxy as right worship. Right worship begins in prayer which is formed through communal liturgy and creates the attitude of love and “purity of heart” that is necessary for one’s role as a Christian.¹⁴⁷ While this had been locked into monasteries and convents for centuries, a life of orthodoxy is being revived among all Christians. Instead of being the highest class of Christians, Fr. Kavanagh insists that, “religious are called by their vocation, their vows, and the life they lead twenty-four hours a day to be prophetic witnesses to this communion in freedom…All Christians must love, all must believe, all must hope; but

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¹⁴⁴ Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 158.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 159.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 160.
the religious discloses to all what gospel freedom is by living it, and breathing it, and speaking it.” Christians can only be formed by this prophetic example engaging in communal worship and being formed by the liturgy. Again, this is theologia prima, and it is the well spring for all of Christian living and thinking. It is Fr. Kavanagh’s very premise that the way we become Christians forms us into this way of life. For this reason, it is necessary to mine his theology of initiation and connect it more closely to the life of Christian worship in liturgy.

The mission of unpacking Fr. Kavanagh’s theology in this chapter suggests that liturgy is intimately connected with initiation. It also suggests, per Schmemann, that we cannot pull out individual sacraments, such as Eucharist and baptism, and identify individual points at which they ‘happen’. As explained above, the gathering of the assembly has historically been seen as the beginning of the Eucharist. The sacrament itself is more than the consecratory formula just as baptism is more than just the sprinkling of water and the anointing with oil. These are sacraments because they happen within the sacrament that is the Church itself; the graced assembly gathered in liturgical worship.

The next chapter will tie Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of initiation directly to his liturgical theology, but already it can be seen that his theology can provide a way to improve the liturgy of the Church. This is especially true if we pay heed to the importance of ritual and symbolic understanding. Reviving our ability to understand ritual, lessening our dependence on textuality and understanding ourselves as those who gather to enact the Church might assist the continuation of liturgical revival. It might

\[149\] See Chapter two, p. 46.
also move liturgical theology back to the center of theological thinking, establishing Fr. Kavanagh’s interpretation of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. 
CHAPTER IV

AIDAN KAVANAGH’S THEOLOGY OF INITIATION

As noted in Chapter one, Fr. Kavanagh deliberately focused his liturgical theology on liturgical structure and initiation not only because of the wealth of material that already existed on the Eucharist, but also because it is our initiation into the Church which allows us to participate in the Eucharist. The preceding chapter also explained how various forces in history had diminished the importance of baptism and the sacraments of initiation. However, Kavanagh opined that key elements of the initiation process remained within the tradition. “In this perspective one might suggest that the ancient catechumenate…never died out as cultures were Christianized. Rather, the catechumenate gradually migrated into monastic and religious houses…The sacramental ends of these ‘catechumenal’ entities shifted correspondingly from baptism, confirmation, and eucharistic communion to religious vows and ordination.” The correlation between the Church and State during the medieval period had an impact on initiation. The Church did not need to evangelize the unbaptized; the initiatory energy of the Church was directed toward the baptized and incorporating piety into their lives. One was said to have entered the Church when one joined a religious order. As noted previously, this led to considering the religious and the ordained as ‘first-class Christians’, a symptom of the clericalization of the Church and the introduction of hierarchy before community.

The “clerical attitude” noted above is changing in the Church, albeit unevenly. According to Fr. Kavanagh, this is a result of a renewal of the practice and theology of

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1 See Chapter one.
2 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 156.
3 Ibid., 155.
initiation. This chapter will interrelate the sacraments of initiation with Fr. Kavanagh’s larger liturgical theology.

It is important to note that initiation into the Church is more than just baptism. Fr. Kavanagh takes his cue from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, which refers to the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist as the sacraments of initiation and one initiation process. A key to his theology of initiation is that these sacraments “neither in isolation from each other nor taken together as a complex whole, can go surrogate for the entire gamut of phenomena that make up Christian initiation.” These three sacraments cause what they signify, but they are part of a greater process that includes evangelization, catechumenal catechesis and post-baptismal catechesis.

This chapter will also depict Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of catechesis as conversion therapy. As noted in Chapter one, Fr. Kavanagh’s own conversion to the Church might have been lacking in this type of catechesis. Perhaps this might explain why he may have so greatly focused on its importance. Following the notion of catechesis as conversion therapy, the structures of the sacraments of initiation will be explored. Fr. Kavanagh’s historical approach to structure attempts to explain why these sacraments can only be understood in relation to one another. His theology of initiation questions certain assumptions about the purpose of both baptism and confirmation. His questions come both from historical structure and from the reformed *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Fr. Kavanagh insists that this rite implies that RCIA is to be considered the norm of baptism. This reading of the rite is influenced by the practice of

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5 This leads to a brief discussion on the nature of sin and the assumption that delayed confirmation is needed to provide a religious ceremony in adolescence.
the Eastern Church which knows a sacramental order of baptism, immediate chrismation and Eucharist on all those being initiated. Alexander Schmemann’s own work on baptism will be used to highlight Fr. Kavanagh’s writing in this area. Finally, this chapter will explore the relationship between baptism and Eucharist. Fr. Kavanagh wrote two books and several articles on the importance of this connection and how it had been forgotten.

**Initiation and Liturgy**

Fr. Kavanagh’s explanation of liturgy as *theologia prima* was evidenced to be founded on several key points. One of those points was the correct relationship between *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Chapter three highlighted that this ‘tag’ is the truncated form of *lex supplicant legem statuat credendi*.6 The relationship between the sacraments of initiation and liturgy are intimately related to *lex supplicant*. Those who participate in the liturgy and enact and become transformed by *theologia prima* are those initiated into the fullness of the Church. The nature of this initiation is one of supplication. “Lex supplicant is something much more specific than the broad and fuzzy notion of the ‘practice of the Church’. While it does indeed have to do with Church worship, at root it has to do with a definite aspect of that worship. It is a law of supplicatory prayer…prayer which petitions God for the whole range of human needs in specific, a law of euchological petition.”7 As Fr. Kavanagh explains, historically, the first act of a newly baptized and confirmed member of the Church is to join the assembly in

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6 Chapter three, p. 74.
7 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 134. This also explains why changing *lex supplicant* to *lex orandi* weakens the correct relationship between the two. “Lex supplicant thus has primary reference to a particular type of Christian prayer, and then by extension it can be referred to the broader spectrum of liturgical worship in general. But when it is extended even farther to encompass the whole ‘practice of the Church’, the law begins to lose both focus and force.” 135.
the Prayers of the Faithful. “The lex supplicandi here takes on concrete euchological form whose raison d’être is the baptized status of those who, in Christ, pray in such a way.” Supplicatory prayer, which is afforded to those initiated into the Church, is the basis for understanding the primacy of the liturgical act in relation to both doctrine and further theological reflection.

This basic assertion also shapes Fr. Kavanagh’s ecclesiology. Baptism and the other sacraments of initiation define the Church, just as they define the other sacraments. “This faith (in Jesus Christ dead and risen) is no mere noetic thing but a way of living together…this is what the eucharist signifies, celebrates, and causes within the community of the Faithful: it is the Church. All other sacraments and sacramentals—from matrimony to holy orders to penance, anointing of the sick, vows and blessings—find their meaning and purpose only within this ‘economic’ context.” In his reading of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Fr. Kavanagh sees a “strategic vision of the church local and universal.” That this constitutes a renewal in the Church that goes beyond merely changing the liturgical structure of baptism is evidenced by understanding the role baptism should have on renewing the Church. This enlarged view of baptism might not strike the average church-goer as important because, “it has become difficult for us to take Baptism seriously anymore. Not only is it usually done rather hastily, upon sleeping infants, in private, with a minimum of symbolic robustness…it has also been allowed to float free of the community’s regular worship-life, especially at the Easter

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8 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 135.
9 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 145.
Vigil.”¹¹ The public making of members of the Church has an important effect on who constitutes the Church and the Church’s role in the World. This ecclesiology is spelled out by the reintroduction of the catechumenate.

In his article, “The Ecclesiology of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” George Worgul also notes that the revised rite had important implications for ecclesiology.¹² One of the implications highlighted by the new rite is that the Church has begun to recognize itself in a culture that is no longer Christian. “The Church must have the courage to proclaim the gospel, ever new, or face condemnation as a dead institution of the past.”¹³ He refers to this process as understanding the shift in “first principles.” “No longer can the Church base its initiation process on the first principles of the middle ages envisioning a theocentric world with a perfect leader, the Church.”¹⁴ The first principles, or underlying beliefs and assumptions of current culture are quite different from those found in in the second and sixth centuries.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that while Fr. Kavanagh seems to view the RCIA as a return, albeit with some changes, to the historical initiatory practice of the early Church, Worgul sees the new rite as ‘new’ but with an eye to the practice of the past.¹⁶ This has much to do with his reading of the rite as a change in first principles of the Church. One cannot go backward and embrace an ancient tradition in the hopes that it will speak to a new time and culture. Rather, Worgul proposes that the Church sees similarities in its current position to that of the past and uses tradition to create a new rite that will speak to the new time.

¹³ Ibid., 161.
¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵ Ibid., 162.
¹⁶ Ibid., 161. Worgul notes, “It (the Church) must reach down to the origins of the Church’s being.” Also, 162, “One should not find it strange that the CIA bears many resemblances to the process employed in this era (2nd-6th centuries) and draws heavily from its model and rich traditions.”
The historical take on the sacraments of initiation are key to understanding how the new rite influences ecclesiology and the liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh thinks that the separation of the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist) has not only led to an unhealthy lack of focus on the importance of baptism, but has also weakened the Church’s role in the World and the Church’s liturgy. “[P]astoral emphasis has shifted away from Baptism to the more crucial rites and ages such as Penance and First Communion for children and Confirmation for adolescents...The shift encourages us to become fixated on youth, leaving baptized adults to shift for themselves, so far as the Gospel is concerned, and unbaptized adults unevangelized.”

Much of this may be due to a misunderstanding of the sacraments themselves. As Alexander Schmemann notes when describing the sacramental interdependence of the sacraments of initiation, “For them (the individual church-goer), Eucharist is precisely one of the sacraments, one ‘means of grace’ among many, and, like all the others, aimed at the personal sanctification of the faithful.” There is a loss of understanding that each of the sacraments of initiation fulfills the other in moving the person into the full life of the Church.

The reinstitution of the catechumenate requires that the Church once again assumes its evangelizing mission as crucial. Fr. Kavanagh sketches an excellent picture of the history of the evolution of baptismal and initiation rites, and while the breakdown of these rites was a slow-moving process, he does note that the period of Christendom

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19 Christendom refers to the time following the fall of the Roman Empire until the splintering of the Church during the Reformation. This is the time when the Church stepped into a correlative role with the State. Fr. Kavanagh usually refers to this as the medieval period.
had a very detrimental effect on initiatory polity. “When, for example, there was a
certain real correlation between Church and civil State…then the Church could and did
expect that evangelization and catechesis could be accomplished on many levels by the
culture itself…Medieval initiatory polity was thus directed not so much at conversion of
those outside to the faith as at conversion of those within the Church to lives of greater
piety.”20 Worgul notes that the rite hints at a certain “revulsion” towards indiscriminate
initiation, “There appears to be an admission that there is no birthright to membership in
the Church, but that membership is a privilege to be worked for and won by a conversion,
a commitment and actions commensurate to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”21 The
conversion and commitment comes through the evangelizing activity of the Church.
Evangelization is key to the creation of the catechumenate, so much so, that the RCIA
establishes the precatechumenate. This is the period when the unbaptized hear the Word
of God and witness the life of the Church. This experience should lead to the initial
response of faith that causes the hearer to seek out a formal relationship with the Church.

As Fr. Kavanagh suggests, evangelization is a very important and intimidating
step. Evangelization is the task of all the baptized and “[t]he state of the catechumenate
will inevitably tell one much about the quality of the local church’s corporate faith in
Jesus Christ.”22 This is because the whole Church is responsible for both evangelization
and the process of conversion and initiation.23 But just as the local Church has the
responsibility of evangelizing and living a Christian life that is attractive to the

of Adults,*” 162, “There is no medieval presupposition that being born into a Christian family guarantees the
future choice of living as a Christian.”
22 Ibid., 169.
23 Worgul, “The Ecclesiology of *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,*” 162. He also ties this element
of the new rite to the expanded notion of ministry within the Church that is supposed in the rite. “The CIA
calls for an actualization and acceptance of pluriform ministries and gifts in the local church.”
unbaptized, so too the catechumens have an important role for the Church itself. In previous chapters, it was noted that both Fr. Kavanagh and Alexander Schmemann critique contemporary liturgies as being either too individualized or as being nothing more than self-help sessions. The reduction of the sacraments of initiation is partly responsible for this state of the liturgy. We cannot understand the awesomeness of our own baptism not only because baptism is perceived of as being unimportant, but because we do not regularly witness the privileges of this baptism. “The regular experience of seeing those Christians not yet of the Faithful dismissed from the assembly after the service of the Word in a friendly yet firm manner and with prayer can, if well done, become a powerful catechesis of the Faithful themselves on the sublimity of their own baptism. This constitutes by itself a most valuable ministry rendered the Church at large by its catechumens.” The catechumenate acts as a witness to the Church for the need of constant conversion. The Church and her liturgies may have lost the memory of this need.

The privatization of mass has been presented as one of the symptoms of weakened liturgical practice. The catechumenate and the rites surrounding their conversion, forces the Church to open itself to the greater communal purpose of its

24 Cf. Worgul, “The Ecclesiology of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” 163-164. In addition to being witnesses, the faithful are to “interact with the candidates in (colloquia private) individual conversations, in family settings (ad candidatos admittendos in familias,) and in general gatherings of the community (immo in quosdam communitatatis coetus).”

25 See Chapters 2 and 3.

26 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 168.

27 Kavanagh, “The Norm of Baptism: The New Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” 147. Cf. Worgul, “The Ecclesiology of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” 166. The new rite not only renews the sense of the importance of baptism and the need for conversion, but Worgul also notes that it reinforces the role of the local church. “The CIA presents the local church as a liturgical-sacramental ekklesia…Foremost, the local community is involved in a ritual in the fullest meaning of the term. The Church is performing its work, which is making Christians.” This would certainly support a view that the sacraments are neither individual events nor that they are for the attainment of individual piety. Rather, it supports both Fr. Kavanagh and Schmemann’s view that the purpose of the Church and the assembly is the liturgy itself.
worship. Not only is the Church responsible for evangelizing and witnessing faith to the unbaptized, it is also responsible to acknowledge its own need for constant conversion through the witness of converts. “The very spirit of this discipline perhaps makes uneasy those today who have become accustomed to religion as a private affair.”

Fr. Kavanagh connects this to the theme of renewal found in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The reform of initiation and baptism does much to renew the liturgical life of the Church, and the role of the catechumenate is important to this. Catechumens in our midst and their ritual dismissal do much to aid the ongoing conversion of the Church. How can religion be a private affair when we are all asked to pray for God’s aid for the catechumen? How can we not understand the importance of communion and our role in Eucharist when we see that those not yet fully initiated are not yet ready to participate in the sacrament?

As noted in Chapter one, Fr. Kavanagh considers the time of the catechumenate as a time of conversion therapy. The reformed rites of initiation seem to take a similar approach to the period of the catechumenate. The formation of catechumens is not limited to private classroom instruction but “is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life.”

The dual purpose of this catechesis is to both acquaint them with Church doctrine, “but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.” This initiation structure that Fr. Kavanagh calls conversion therapy is necessary because of the traumatic nature of conversion as exemplified by

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28 Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 114.
29 Chapter one, pg. 16.
30 *The Rites, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990), sec. 75.
31 Ibid.
those such as Paul and Augustine. “In these and many other accounts one notices an imperceptibly growing realization that the normalcy of life lived within the conventions of one’s own world is but the face of death itself. The realization finally reaches a focal point of intensity that will not be denied…Time is suspended…Tears, desolation, and total disorientation of one’s personal sense of goals and values follow.”³² The conversion therapy through the catechumenate is necessary “to protect the Church and to protect the individual undergoing such trauma from the Church’s insensitivity to the crisis.”³³ The process of conversion therapy gives the person time to understand the ramifications of conversion and the life to which they are called. It also gives the Church time to continue in its on-going conversion so as to be ready to bring the catechumens into its fold. This is what Fr. Kavanagh envisions communion to be, and it is the goal of the sacraments of initiation.³⁴

It has been noted several times that Fr. Kavanagh views the liturgy as the Church doing the World, meaning that the assembly gathered in praise of God stands as a beacon for how the world should be. The world left to its own devices, under the influence of sin, lives in a radical abnormality. Violence, greed, starvation and other horrors that seem to be the ‘norm’ of the world, are to be regarded as abnormal by those living a life of faith in Jesus Christ.³⁵ This is the life of orthodoxy, right worship, mentioned in the previous chapter. “This is why orthodox Christian tradition has steadily perceived baptism as the fundamental separation of the baptized from such a world…This is the antithesis of regarding the world with disinterest. It is, rather, to play extremely hard ball

³³ Ibid.
³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 159.
with the world by remaining constantly clearheaded about…its perennial need for grace and judgment.\(^{36}\) Christian liturgy reconstitutes the normal world through communion with God in Christ. Only those initiated into this orthodoxy can participate in the World being done as it was meant. As Fr. Kavanagh notes, this is a dangerous way to live, and the Church suffers much from the reaction of the abnormal world to its example of normality.\(^{37}\) Our initiation into such a way of life constitutes a willingness to suffer and die at the hands of the abnormal World.

**Eastern Influences on Fr. Kavanagh’s Theology of Initiation**

The influence that liturgical practices of the Eastern Church had on Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology was highlighted in the previous chapter. These same influences can be seen in Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to the sacraments of initiation. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology presents the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* as the norm of baptism, and does so because of his historical approach to both baptism and confirmation, and their connection to Eucharist. Exploring the history of these sacraments will explain his opinion on such things as infant baptism and its relation to a misunderstanding of sin as well as the origination of confirmation as a dismissal following baptism. Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence of the appropriate order of the sacraments of initiation will be explained through this historical sketch.

In his book, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, Alexander Schmemann echoes Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence on the importance of baptism. When explaining the importance of the Eucharist and its role in liturgical theology he notes, “the essential nature of the Church being actualized in the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Church’s

\(^{36}\) Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 159.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
life, it is also true that the sacraments of entrance into the Church (Baptism and Chrismation) lead us in this life and unite us with this essential nature. They lead into the Church and into the Eucharist.”

Again, the Eucharist cannot be studied or participated in properly or fully without first experientially understanding its role as a sacrament of initiation. This can be accomplished by elevating the importance of baptism for our participation in the Eucharist. Initiating members into the Church and preparing them for the Eucharist has been the primary focus of the Church since it was born.

Fr. Kavanagh begins his historical sketch of baptism by explaining the various types of baptisms and ritual baths found in Judaism at the time of Jesus. While the Christian understanding of baptism goes beyond other types of baptism, Fr. Kavanagh asserts that the context of baptisms in Judaism would have influenced the New Testament authors in their own understanding of Jesus’ baptism by John and the baptismal practices of the early Church.

The most unique baptism written of in the New Testament is, of course, Jesus’ own baptism. “One of the many who came to receive a conversion baptism for the remission of sins was perceived by John to be, and then was divinely manifested as, both the King-Messiah and the Servant of the Lord foretold by the prophets (Matthew 3.13-17).”

While Jesus’ own baptism is certainly connected to John’s baptism, it is also different. “Similarly, Jesus’ own baptism is undoubtedly the source of Christian baptism yet different from it as well.”

Essentially, our baptismal

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39 This is not primarily an intellectual understanding of Eucharist, one based on understanding Church doctrine, but an experiential understanding that comes from participating in the liturgy. This experiential understanding can be communicated through robust liturgical ritual and practices that include more public baptisms and the process of RCIA (discussed below).
42 Ibid.
practice is not based on one single event of baptism as remembered in the New Testament. It comes from a specific milieu and knows the full history of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. It points towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom. As Fr. Kavanagh points out, “It is into this whole sweep of redemptive activity that Christian initiation splices one.” This is one reason why the early Church knew several different baptismal rites and why the meaning of baptism has focused on both a remission of sin and death and rebirth through Jesus.

Fr. Kavanagh notes that while the New Testament authors did not leave us a baptismal structure or ritual of initiation the ritualizing of baptism was evolving. Fr. Kavanagh combines the Jewish ritual of ablution and John’s baptism of repentance, Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, the events of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and other allusions to baptism in the New Testament to create a basic initiatory structure: “First in both sequence and importance, the proclamation of the gospel...always precedes baptism.” He notes that the only exception to this is Paul. Paul does not hear the Gospel but has direct revelation of Jesus as Christ. “Second, the normal response of those who hear the gospel proclaimed is expected to be conversion to the faith in the exalted Lord...Third, the gospel proclaimed and believed usually results in the water bath itself.” The final step in the structure is the events of Christian living that follow water baptism. “In other words, what apostolic proclamation, conversion and baptism in water and Spirit...resulted in was life in the Spirit-filled community living by apostolic teaching.” One was baptized into a new life. According to Fr. Kavanagh, this structure

43 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 14.
44 Ibid., 20-21.
46 Ibid., 22.
can be considered ‘common ground’ for the various initiatory practices that are evidenced in the early Church.

There is an important note to be made about the water baptism. Fr. Kavanagh insists that the water baptism was a ritual that was naturally adapted to Christian initiation from the surrounding culture, but that following the events of Pentecost, it became more than just a baptism for remission of sins. “Both water baptism and the outpouring of the Spirit are necessary, but it is of less importance to note which comes first than to realize how both follow upon the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation.”\(^{47}\) He makes this distinction as a way to clarify how one should approach the use of the word ‘baptism’ in New Testament texts. Despite the Jewish milieu out of which the water bath grew, the Churches of the New Testament period would have begun to add the out-pouring of the Spirit to the meaning of the baptismal ritual. “It must be remembered that the baptism of Christians was not johannine but christic: it was baptism not of water but of Holy Spirit. The Water bath is a function of the Spirit. This means that pneumatic data concerning Christian baptism subordinate water data: the latter are to be understood in terms of the former.”\(^{48}\) Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence on this allows him to read the New Testament texts for signs of the evolution of baptism. The initiation rites that scholars have better access to, those in the post-apostolic early Church would seem to come from nowhere if baptism had not begun to be ritualized in the Churches of the New Testament.

The rituals of baptism continued to grow and evolve in the early Church. In addition to the water bath, Fr. Kavanagh finds more evidence of the importance of

\(^{47}\) Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 19.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., 25. It seems that Fr. Kavanagh is using the word “johannine” to refer to John the Baptist, as the distinction he is making is between water baptism and baptism in the Spirit.
anointing in the rites studied from this time.49 Reviewing both Eastern Syrian and Greco-
Latin sources, Fr. Kavanagh asserts that anointing is the earliest ritual act to be associated
with the water bath. “Anointing with oil in connection with baptism, for example, is
witnessed in the very earliest stages of the ritualization process.”50 In essence, it is the
anointing that makes the water bath a spirit-laden event. This ritual pattern is closely
based on the witness of the Gospels: “The scene at the Jordan culminates not in Jesus’
descent into the water but in the descent of the Spirit upon him, designating him the
Anointed One of prophecy.”51 The act of anointing following immersion is a public act
of sealing the initiate’s conversion. The early ritual structure surmised from these
sources is: 1) preparation for baptism through instruction; 2) anointing and exorcism; 3)
the water bath in the Name of the Trinity; 4) an anointing; 5) hand-laying by the bishop,
and possible final anointing; 6) Eucharist.52 Fr. Kavanagh traces this historical
development to show the importance of the complete ritual structure; each event is a
closely coordinated act that derives its meaning from the whole. This early ritual
structure is later disrupted when the anointing and hand-laying become separated and
form the sacrament of confirmation.

The separation of these rites is linked closely to the frequency of infant baptism.
Although the Church had always baptized infants and children53 the earliest rites
presuppose an adult catechumen. Using Hippolytus’ Apostolic Tradition (from the
second or early third century) as his source, Fr. Kavanagh illuminates the continuing

49 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 26-30. Note that Fr. Kavanagh thinks that anointing or ‘unction’ was
also an important part of baptism in the New Testament Churches. This is one reason why he thinks
biblical scholars should look at the use of those words from a baptismal context.
50 Ibid., 52.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 46.
53 Ibid., 66. He notes that in Hippolytus’ Apostolic Tradition, infants and children are to be baptized first.
evolution of initiatory rites. Those who wish to convert are enrolled. As Fr. Kavanagh notes, this is “no mere formality: whole classes of people—such as pimps…pagan priests…and men with concubines—are not to be accepted into this class of learners.”\textsuperscript{54}

Those who are enrolled are allowed to hear the word and have their lives scrutinized by the Church to see if they live in a manner befitting a Christian. After these inquiries are made, the person has entered the lengthy period of the catechumenate. Again, as mentioned in the previous section, the period of the catechesis is less about instruction in doctrine than it is prayerful reading and understanding of the gospel done as a group. The catechumens met regularly to pray, to receive instruction and to be supported through the process.

Following several years of catechesis and formation, the catechumen is moved to the status of the elect. As they prepare for their baptism their lives are again examined. This is also a period of frequent exorcisms and public scrutiny. Previous catechesis was often done separate from the general assembly, but during this time, the catechumens are brought into the service of the Word to begin their participation in the life of the Church. This entire lengthy process culminates in the Easter vigil when the initiate undergoes exorcism, water bath, anointing and hand-laying. Following this, they share in the kiss of peace and prayers of the faithful before receiving Eucharist.

The preceding recounting of the full rites of initiation from Hippolytus is necessary to understand how within a few centuries the notion of an adult catechumenate had begun to fade. Steps such as enrollment and public scrutiny of the catechumens on

\textsuperscript{54} Kavanagh, \textit{The Shape of Baptism}, 55.
Lenten Sundays are missing from documents that date to the sixth and eighth centuries.\textsuperscript{55}

As infant baptism had become the norm in Christendom, and as Roman rites were being pushed as the norm for northern churches that had different baptismal rites, the separation of anointing, sealing and hand-laying from the whole baptismal rite began. “Many churches of the west which followed their own liturgical traditions seem originally to have known no consignation with hand-laying and a second anointing with chrism.”\textsuperscript{56}

These churches often separated this part of the rite and anointed after communion, or at a later church service. As Fr. Kavanagh explains, this separation of rites called for a theological justification, “they explained the now separated invocation of the Spirit, hand-laying, and second anointing with chrism as an increase in initial baptismal grace.”\textsuperscript{57}

This practice, in addition to an Augustinian interpretation of the need for immediate infant baptism, worked together in to dissolve the original initiatory practice of the Church.

The ritual for baptism of both infants and adults in the early Church did not discriminate; all the newly baptized were anointed and sealed and participated in the Eucharist. The later theology that supported delaying the anointing and sealing was greatly influenced by Augustine’s use of the practice of infant baptism in his arguments against Pelagius. “Augustine based his arguments against Pelagius chiefly on the practice of infant baptism with its exorcisms.”\textsuperscript{58} As Fr. Kavanagh notes, according to Augustine, the devil is literally driven out from the newly born\textsuperscript{59}; thus, we are incapable

\textsuperscript{55} Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 68. Fr. Kavanagh compares AT to the Gelasian Sacramentary and the Ordo Romanus XI.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., The Shape of Baptism, 91.

of attaining salvation through our own efforts as original sin includes a certain level of personal guilt. Augustine’s teaching on the immediate need for baptism of infants also reflected “that by (his) time the baptism of infants was settling in as the usual way one became a Christian.” Even though the rites, which included exorcisms, were originally intended for adults who had incurred personal guilt, Augustine insisted that the purpose of the exorcisms was the same for infants; they too had to be cleansed of their personal guilt. “Thus a doctrine of original sin involving personal culpability for everyone did not produce change in liturgical practice: rather, change in liturgical practice concerning infant baptism produced the Augustinian concept of original sin as necessarily implying personal guilt.”

Infants needed immediate baptism, but the anointing and sealing of that sacrament could be postponed either for Episcopal convenience or because the Church realized that more formation was necessary for those who were baptized as infants.

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that little ones, even those who have just been born, are freed from slavery to the devil by the grace of Christ. Even apart from the fact that they are baptized for the forgiveness of sins by a rite that is not false, but true, they are first exorcised; then, the power of the enemy is expelled, and they respond by the words of their sponsors that they renounce that power.”

60 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 90. Cf. Augustine, “Punishment and the Forgiveness of Sins, Book Three”, The Grace of Christ and Original Sin, Book Two: Original Sin, ed. John Rotelle, (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1997), 12, 20. “And no matter how holy and righteous the parents are who begot them, little ones are released from the guilt of original sin, only if they have been baptized in Christ.” It seems clear that Augustine firmly believed in efficacy of baptism to remove original sin even from infants who had incurred no personal sin. Fr. Kavanagh notes that the entire initiation rite (including instruction and exorcisms) for adults usually took several years but “had become telescoped into a swollen ritual act performed all at one time when it was brought to bear on infants.” Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 90.

61 Ibid., 91. Two of the classic justifications for infant baptism are found in the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 2:38-39, where Peter says to the Jews, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you…For the promise is made to you and to your children…” Also, Act 16:15, “After she and her household had been baptized.” It is implied that there was no age restriction on baptism, and that entire households, including infants were among those being baptized by the Apostles. The teaching from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith implies that infant baptism was the practice of the early Church and had declined in the fourth century. “At that time even adults postponed their Christian initiation out of apprehension about future sins and fear of public penance, and many parents put off the Baptism of their children for the same reasons. But it must also be noted that Fathers and Doctors such as Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine, who were themselves baptized as adults on account of this state of affairs, vigorously reacted against such negligence and begged adults not to postpone Baptism since it is necessary for salvation. Several of them insisted that Baptism should be administered to infants.”

This Augustinian teaching on original sin has certainly weakened in the Church’s teaching and we now view original sin as the milieu of sinfulness into which all are born. As Fr. Kavanagh explains, this is the view that early western Church fathers generally held. “Born into a condition of existential sinfulness, the infant cannot but surely sin, thereby appropriating to itself that condition in a culpable manner…the human being will ultimately become personally culpable…unless access to the wholly special resources of God’s grace in Christ is provided.”62 This also explains why the early Church, which knew a large adult catechumenate, had also baptized infants and children. Ideally, the unevangelized enter the Church as adults, ready to be forgiven of their sins and embrace the life of the Church. However, it was recognized that all ages needed the support of the Church in order to live a redeemed life. The practice of exorcisms (and the renunciation of sin) in the Church’s current initiatory rites deserve special note. Despite current theological thinking on the nature of original sin, the Church still practices exorcisms in both forms of the rite of baptism.

Alexander Schmemann provides a rich explanation for the importance of exorcisms before baptism, especially in light of contemporary culture. In his book, Of Water and the Spirit, Schmemann walks through both the historical and contemporary rites of initiation in the Eastern Church. His teachings on exorcisms are part of the section on the catechumenate, but he notes that since baptism is now usually performed on infants, the exorcisms are no longer part of the preparation for baptism.63 He suggests that we have lost our concept of the devil, and have indeed sought to modernize religious

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62 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 90.
practice by removing thoughts that seem superstitious. This is part of the
demythologizing of religion, and probably a symptom of our private approach to religion.

Schmemann insists that exorcisms are still an important part of the rite of
initiation. “The Church has always had the experience of the demonic, has always, in
plain words, known the Devil…the demonic and, more generally, evil are precisely the
reality of the irrational.” He notes that the scholastic and modern attempt to rationalize
evil as absence is in error; thinking that enlightenment of humanity by its own means
alone will cause humans to be good is wrong. “Here evil is most emphatically not a mere
absence. It is precisely a presence: the presence of something dark, irrational and very
real.” According to Fr. Kavanagh, this is the very real source of the abnormal world to
which our baptism puts us at odds. “Orthodoxia has every reason to regard a child dead
of war or starved by poverty as anything but normal. It also has every reason to expect
that this world will not be able to abolish such horrors if left to its own resources.” The
first part of exorcism is to acknowledge the reality of evil, the presence of abnormality in
the World. As Schmemann points out, the path that leads to baptism must travel past this
point and adamantly clear the path from this darkness.

The exorcisms and the renunciation of Satan, which precede the public statement
of our allegiance to Christ, are still included in the western rites for infants because of the
reality to which they speak. Ideally, the parents and godparents speaking for the child, as
well as the faithful assembled, publicly stand to acknowledge that the life of the Church
is in direct opposition to the deadly, evil and abnormal forces in the World. The newly

64 Schmemann, Of Water and the Spirit, 21.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 159.
68 Schmemann, Of Water and the Spirit, 23.
baptized joins a people who do not hide from the World, but who are expected to stand as a witness to how God intended the World to be. Hence, Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence that liturgy is Church doing World. Of course, it can be debated whether or not parents and sponsors really believe this. One of the results of the weakened initiatory polity of the Church is that infants are baptized less to become full members of a Church doing World than out of a need for cultural continuity. It was Fr. Kavanagh’s hope that a renewed focus on evangelization and initiation would help to change this attitude.

It has been explained that certain teachings surrounding the practice of infant baptism eventually led to separating the rites of initiation (baptism, consignation/chrismation and Eucharist). As the rites broke free from their original structure, there was a need for theological justification. This led to the sacrament of confirmation. Confirmation, a version of consignation usually done at the hand of the bishop in the early Church, is the source of much theological consideration. 69 To

69 There have been many controversies surrounding confirmation throughout history. Whether questioning who the minister of confirmation is (cf. Aidan Kavanagh, “Origin and Reform of Confirmation,” in Confirmation: Origins, History and Pastoral Situation Today, ed. L. Leijssen, Studies in Liturgy, vol. 70: 76. He cites Innocent I as noting that confirmation belongs solely to the Episcopal office.) Whether it is a sacrament, (cf. Lambert Leijssen, “Status Quaestionis,” in Origins, History and Pastoral Situation Today, ed. L. Leijssen, Studies in Liturgy, (1989), vol. 70: 10-11. He explains the importance of confirmation in the Lutheran tradition but notes that it is not considered a sacrament.) Or at what age one should be confirmed (cf. Luis Maldonado and David Power, “Editorial,” in Structures of Initiation in Crisis, eds. Maldonado and Power, (New York, N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1979), viii. While providing an overview of the essays for this volume, they note that age for celebrating the sacraments of initiation rise as the questions most frequently posed. Note that Fr. Kavanagh was less concerned about the age of celebrating the sacraments of initiation than he was about their theological importance for the Church.) The controversy surrounding confirmation is multi-faceted. As noted below, it comes at the intersection of the importance of infant baptism versus the importance of celebrating the rites of initiation in the order that makes most theological sense. Many volumes of books and many authors took up this debate in the 1970’s and 1980’s after the rites published in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. This controversy is far from over, if not as fervently debated. In an online discussion from the Catholic Herald, UK, there was much heated debate about the Archdiocese of Liverpool confirming children before receiving first communion. http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2011/01/28/debate-are-we-leaving-confirmation-too-late/ accessed on July 22, 2011. In the West, particularly the United States, confirmation has been viewed as a sacrament of maturity; a rite of passage into adulthood in the Church. The reasons for this are discussed in depth below, as is Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of the sacrament and integral to initiation into the Church.
understand Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of initiation, it is necessary to give his perspective on confirmation, both its historical nature and original structure. “It is sometimes noted that confirmation seems to be a rite in search of its meaning. My own studies suggest, however, that confirmation is more a flock of meanings in search of a rite, and the search has been conducted more by systematic theologians and historians of doctrine than by liturgical scholars.”70 This is why Fr. Kavanagh turns his attention to confirmation in several articles and one book. In his book on baptism, he presented the anointing that came at the hand of the bishop as being an epiclesis of the Holy Spirit. “The conventional view of scholars is that it was, and I followed this reading in The Shape of Baptism.”71 In his book on confirmation, he presents an argument that confirmation grew out of the structure of the rite of baptism. It was a dismissal that signaled the movement from baptism to Eucharist.

Fr. Kavanagh’s study of ancient liturgical structures is an attempt to clarify the confusing sacrament of confirmation. As he notes, “It is as though confirmation represents a long-term misunderstanding of baptism, reduplicating baptismal chrismation and denigrating baptism itself by implying that confirmation adds to, completes or otherwise develops realities begun but not finished in baptism itself.”72 Fr. Kavanagh provides a brief sketch of how confirmation came to its current role in the Church. The prevalence of infant baptism led to a narrow understanding of catechesis. No longer was it conversion therapy for adults, but soon an educational program for indoctrinating children. As he notes, “This did not produce a very evangelical or faith-mature

71 Kavanagh, Confirmation: Origins and Reform, ix.
community, but one strong on cohesion around approved practices…The ethos created was …childish rather than childlike, apologetical rather than evangelical…and militant. It produced some splendid statistical results.”

The separation of confirmation from baptism was hastened when it became the exclusive ministry of bishops. It was often delayed until one was of marriageable age, when one then received Eucharist, perhaps the sacrament of marriage or took religious vows and then began going to confession.

“Nominal adulthood was thus a time of high sacramental intensity: The Holy Spirit ‘revived’ young people’s baptism…and communion regularized their lives as practicing Christians.”

This all led to de-emphasizing both baptism and Eucharist because only the bishop could confirm, making it the sacramental highlight of Christian initiation.

The practices above developed in the Middle Ages, but Fr. Kavanagh sees their continuing influence. The current initiatory practice in the United States is that those baptized in infancy prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation and Eucharist around the age of seven. Confirmation is then considered the sacrament of adolescence and happens around the age of sixteen. As Fr. Kavanagh notes, “If this is still ‘initiatory’, then confirmation, not eucharist, becomes the ‘seal of initiation’ about which the tradition, the conciliar reforms and the 1983 Code speak.”

Canon 891 states that confirmation is to be administered at “the age of discretion.” The age of discretion is generally considered to be age seven, the age of preparation for Eucharist. Fr. Kavanagh also notes, that Canon 891 must be read in light of Canon 842.2 “which sets the standard for the whole

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74 Ibid., 36.
75 Ibid., 39.
legal expression of the initiatory norm.” Canon 842.2 states, “The sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Most Holy Eucharist are interrelated in such a way that they are required for full Christian initiation.” The caveat to this law is that Episcopal conferences can designate a different age for confirmation, but must take care to keep the connection between the three sacraments of initiation. Fr. Kavanagh feels that the current practices do not adequately keep the connection.

As mentioned above, these contemporary practices have had the effect of denigrating both baptism and Eucharist, and while these practices may have roots in pastoral sensitivity to the spiritual needs of adolescents, Fr. Kavanagh calls confirmation the right of exit from the Church. Speaking of the warping of importance of baptism and Eucharist, he notes, “All this is intensified as this usage and catechesis of confirmation is found in practice to serve as an opportunity for youth to leave the church more often than to enter it more deeply, as many hope.” These practices are what fueled Fr. Kavanagh’s study of the roots of confirmation and his conclusion that the sacrament is actually part of the ancient dismissal structure of the Church.

Fr. Kavanagh questions all of the theological debate and misinterpretation of confirmation by suggesting that the relationship between baptism and confirmation is

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77 Kavanagh, Confirmation: Origins and Reform, 98.
79 While the complimentary norm stated by the USCCB “decrees that the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin Rite shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age” it does not elaborate how postponing confirmation past the age of discretion keeps the integrity of the sacraments of initiation. http://www.usccb.org/norms/891.htm (accessed on April 10, 2011).
80 The exit of young adults from the Church is multi-layered. The phenomenon Fr. Kavanagh describes is often attributed to the fact that the Church, and the Gospel message of Jesus Christ, have become irrelevant in contemporary society. If this is the case, Fr. Kavanagh would argue that the Church has helped to author this irrelevance by not connecting the importance of initiatory rites to the liturgy. Assembling as a Church has come to be more about obligation (with no real purpose) than the purposeful gathering of the Church itself.
primarily structural rather than theological. 82 “But what if confirmation, which is unique to the initiation procedure of the Church of Rome and its derivatives, is in fact a synaxis in its own right with its own archaic structural integrity distinct if not wholly separable from baptism and eucharist?” 83 Perhaps, too much emphasis has been placed on the sacrament itself. Doing so can confuse the Eastern practice of chrismation with the western practice of confirmation. It can also confuse the invocation of the Holy Spirit in confirmation as somehow completing baptism, as if baptism were pneumatically incomplete. “This latter emphasis is what seems to serve as one reason for denying the eucharist to the newly baptized who are infants: like the Samaritans (Acts 8:1-17), they have not yet received the Holy Spirit.” 84 This is, of course, a misinterpretation of infant baptism. The rite itself baptizes in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The celebration begins by asking God “to give these children new life in abundance through water and the Holy Spirit.” 85 As noted above, the water bath is the vehicle for the Holy Spirit. While it is true that the anointing after baptism does not include an epiclesis to the Holy Spirit, it confirms that the child has been “brought to new life through water and the Holy Spirit.” 86 From this viewpoint, confirmation does not add something that was missed in baptism. 87

Fr. Kavanagh suggests that confirmation is the dismissal or missa that terminates the baptismal rite. He notes that such a dismissal is not common to various the initiatory

82 Kavanagh, “Confirmation: A Suggestion from Structure,” 386.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 387.
85 The Rites, Baptism for Children, (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990), sec. 53.
87 While confirmation does not make up for something missed in baptism, it can be argued that it does add the ecclesial dimension because of the role of the Bishop in the sacrament. However, the initiation of adults does not postpone confirmation for the availability of the Bishop, and the baptism of adults is also an ecclesial event because the Church that gathers is initiating them into the Body of Christ.
rites of the early Church, but suggests that such dismissals can be seen in other liturgical rites.  

He is confident in proposing this hypothesis by again following the assertion of Robert Taft that structure outlives meaning. “Ritual structure is tough and resilient, and it tends to abide even as meanings assigned to it come and go.” Liturgical dismissals “were a central part of liturgical protocol, the formal way by which whole services, and parts of services, ended. They were the seams between liturgical units; their effect was to cause the members of the liturgical assembly either in whole or in part to redeploy themselves inside the building or to leave it altogether.”

It should be remembered that the liturgy of the early Church took the whole of Sunday and was comprised of several individual services in various locations throughout the city. The dismissals brought the various services to a close and signaled the start of the next service.

Fr. Kavanagh cites several examples of ancient dismissals, but it will be enough to highlight one: The dismissal of catechumens from the liturgy of the Word. This dismissal can be experienced first-hand in the revised Rite for Christian Initiation of Adults. These dismissals were historically the “leitourgia proper to the bishop,” and Fr. Kavanagh notes that the bishop was called for the dismissals even if he was not present for the liturgy. The dismissal structure is remarkably similar in various ancient Churches and includes a call to prayer by the deacon, a petitionary prayer for the group done by the bishop and individual laying on of hands by the bishop. It was only after the dismissal of this group that the liturgy of the Eucharist could begin. Catechumens also received a structured dismissal at the end of catechetical prayer services. Again using Hippolytus’

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89 Kavanagh, “The Origins and Reform of Confirmation,” 9
90 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 388.
Apostolic Tradition, Fr. Kavanagh notes that the teacher be he clergy or lay person, was instructed to lay hands on the catechumen to officially end the lesson.\textsuperscript{93} While the dismissals following the liturgy of the Word were proper to the bishop, Fr. Kavanagh notes that in other circumstances it was the responsibility of the senior person present.\textsuperscript{94}

The dismissals grew to become very elaborate and time consuming. “They may also help us understand why in the West the eucharist came to be called \textit{missa}—not in view of its final blessing and diaconal dismissal, but because of the extensive dismissals of catechumens, penitents, and perhaps others which took place at the end of the word service and required a significant amount of time.”\textsuperscript{95} It is this type of elaborate dismissal that Fr. Kavanagh sees when he reads the baptismal rite as related in the \textit{Apostolic Tradition}. Following the baptismal rite sketched in the preceding paragraphs, Fr. Kavanagh notes that the neophytes are now ready to stand as equals in the assembly. “But \textit{before} they do so, or perhaps \textit{as} they do so, the bishop, who until now seems to have done nothing more in the baptismal liturgy than bless the oils at the beginning of the service, performs his special \textit{leitourgia} for the baptized...The \textit{missa} in this instance is \textit{from} baptism and \textit{into} full fellowship in the baptized assembly.”\textsuperscript{96} The meaning of this rite may be considered a public confirmation of the neophyte’s baptism, as baptism was usually done in a place separate from the liturgical assembly. But Fr. Kavanagh suggests that it is structured as a dismissal: First, a prayer of petition for the Holy Spirit, next, an

\textsuperscript{93} Kavanagh, “Confirmation: A Suggestion from Structure,” 388.
\textsuperscript{94} Kavanagh, “The Origins and Reform of Confirmation,” 10.
\textsuperscript{95} Kavanagh, “Confirmation: A Suggestion from Structure,” 389.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 389.
anointing done at the hand of the bishop in the name of the Trinity and an exchange of the kiss of peace.\textsuperscript{97}

Fr. Kavanagh suggests that reading the structure of the rites in this manner can clarify the distinctive, but interrelated nature, of the sacraments of initiation. Baptism-chrismation as a rite stands on its own, and is concluded with a dismissal that prepares the assembly for the liturgy of the Eucharist. “What the bishop does is not to introduce something pneumatically extraordinary into the initiatory sequence, but to perform a rite which strengthens the bond between baptism by water and the Spirit on the one hand, and the eucharist on the other (where the Spirit is prayed for to descend on the communicants in its fullness).”\textsuperscript{98} The meaning of this structure was altered by Pope Innocent I who taught that the Holy Spirit could only be given by bishops. The reasons for this teaching are numerous and had much to do with the impossibility of bishops attending all liturgical services. The effect of this teaching was to suggest that baptism without the confirmation of the bishop was somehow lacking, and it is the eventual separation of the two that led to viewing confirmation as the seal of baptism.\textsuperscript{99}

Given all that has been presented about Fr. Kavanagh’s historical sketch of baptismal rites and his hypothesis from structure about the origin of confirmation, it should not be surprising that he wrote in depth about the reformed \textit{Rite for Christian Initiation of Adults}. These reformed rites were based on a historical study of initiatory practice and reestablished the sequence of the sacraments of initiation that again makes Eucharist the seal of initiation. The reestablished sequence even influenced Canon 891 mentioned above. For these reasons, others highlighted in this chapter, and the witness of

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\textsuperscript{97} Kavanagh, “Confirmation: A Suggestion from Structure,” 390.
\textsuperscript{98} Kavanagh, “The Origins and Reform of Confirmation,” 15.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 17.
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tradition Fr. Kavanagh considered RCIA to be the norm of baptism. “A norm in this sense has nothing to do with the number of times a thing is done, but it has everything to do with the standard according to which a thing is done.” A norm is restrictive only in the sense that it establishes stability of action. As he points out, all societies have norms that are a binding social contract. While levels of abnormality exist, the norm provides the measurement to determine when certain abnormalities may be of danger to the society.

To this end, Fr. Kavanagh considers infant baptism “a benign abnormality so long as it is practiced with prudence as an unavoidable pastoral necessity…such as the frail health of the infant, or in response to the earnest desire of Christian parents whose faith is vigorous and whose way of life gives clear promise that their child will develop in the faith of the Church.” Fr. Kavanagh believes that keeping adult baptism as the norm will provide a check against infant baptism becoming a malignant abnormality. Many Catholics are familiar with the term ‘cradle Catholic’, implying that one was baptized as an infant and may or may not live a life shaped by the Church. Baptizing infants out of social custom is a type of abnormality that Fr. Kavanagh feels has had serious ramifications for the life of the Church. “The Council’s concern was to reiterate that the Church continually comes into existence in and through the full rhythm of Christian initiation, the normal scope of which is to be seen in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.” This is why he considered the rite to be part of the renewal of the Church; all other instances of initiation must be held in relation to adult initiation, because adult initiation renews and reinvigorates the Church.

100 Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism, 108.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., 110.
103 Ibid.
Fr. Kavanagh finds additional support for his assertion that adult baptism is the norm by noting that while the revised rite does not establish *RCIA* as the norm, “there is also no suggestion that the baptism of infants represents the norm of Catholic tradition.”\(^\text{104}\) He asserts that reestablishing the catechumenate and baptism during the Easter Vigil represents the establishment of a subtle norm for baptism. “It implies strongly, even if it does not require, that the initiate be an adult or at least a child well advanced in years.”\(^\text{105}\) Reviewing the revised rite does confirm that neither adult nor infant baptism are established as the explicit norms of baptism, and given the importance of liturgical renewal from the Council one can understand Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence on *RCIA* as being the norm. This is, perhaps, also related to his own personal experience of adult conversion and elements he found lacking. It is curious to note, however, that despite canon law reestablishing the order of the sacraments of initiation, canon 867.1 still insists “Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks.”\(^\text{106}\) Does this establish infant baptism as the norm? Fr. Kavanagh might suggest that it is a throw-back to the Augustinian understanding of original sin. Certainly, having two separate rites of baptism and establishing two initiatory sequences, one for adults and one for infants, can lead to confusion on this matter. To this end, Fr. Kavanagh offers suggestions about the initiation of children.

Fr. Kavanagh’s insistence that *RCIA* is normative can be a deterrent to understanding his fundamental point on the matter. In an article on sacramental catechesis he notes that the norm of baptism requires that “The three sacraments are to be

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\(^{104}\) Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 109.

\(^{105}\) Ibid.

celebrated and received, furthermore, in that order—with confirmation coming as close to baptism as possible (in the *same* service for adults and children of catechetical age, or at the age of discretion for children baptized as infants) followed in both cases immediately by the initiates’ first holy communion.‖¹⁰⁷ In this way, he establishes the norm of the rite as the order of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, an order which is found in the *RCIA*, meaning that any initiatory rite that does not follow this order is an exception to the norm. One way to not allow the exception to become the norm is to apply the initiatory sequence to all who receive baptism. Reflecting on the theological point made about the connection between all three sacraments, Fr. Kavanagh suggests, “it seems inescapable that all who are deemed fit for baptism, no matter what their chronological age, should also be confirmed within the same liturgical event.”¹⁰⁸ He notes that this was the tradition of the Roman Church until the Middle Ages, “and is still the practice of the Orthodox Churches, as we have seen.”¹⁰⁹ The continued practice of delaying confirmation until adolescence, and after reception of the Eucharist, implies that the age of the candidate is an obstacle to initiation. Following this to its logical conclusion, this suggests that the Church should not baptize infants. This is not Fr. Kavanagh’s suggestion. Rather he questions the logic of delaying confirmation and what it implies about baptism.

As Fr. Kavanagh noted, the Eastern Church continues to follow the ancient initiatory structure of baptism, chrismation and Eucharist on all candidates, regardless of age. Schmemann notes that the East has been practicing exclusively infant baptism for

¹⁰⁸ Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 139.
¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
several centuries. “It is all the more significant, then, that liturgically the sacrament has
nevertheless preserved the form and the structure it had when the majority of those
baptized were adults.”¹¹⁰ He explains that some of the ancient rites, such as the
preparatory rites, may seem out of place as infants cannot prepare themselves for
baptism. “We must realize first of all that preparation is a constant and essential aspect
of the Church’s worship as a whole…On the one hand the Church herself is preparation:
she ‘prepares’ us for life eternal…Yet, on the other hand, the Church is also and
essentially fulfillment…Baptism is no exception to this fundamental principle…For the
whole Church is changed, enriched and fulfilled when another child of God is integrated
into her life and becomes a member of Christ’s Body.”¹¹¹ The infant’s parents and
sponsors prepare themselves to bring the candidate into this life of preparation and
fulfillment. The Church is renewed when another member joins in order to be prepared
for the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God that is the Church. As Schmemann notes,
ignoring this principle has liturgical consequences. “They experience no fulfillment
because they ignore preparation, and they ignore preparation because they desire no
fulfillment.”¹¹² Infant baptism, (when viewed correctly and participated in by the whole
Church), should remind the Church of its need for preparation and fulfillment.

One of Fr. Kavanagh’s suggestions regarding the initiating children would follow
the theology of the Eastern Church. Knowing how culturally conditioned the West has
become to infant baptism, yet remaining opposed to confirming and communicating
infants, he offers another suggestion that would keep the norm of initiation (baptism,
confirmation and Eucharist) more intact. He notes that many of the questions

¹¹⁰ Schmemann, Of Water and the Spirit, 15.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 17-18.
¹¹² Ibid., 17.
surrounding the sacraments of initiation are tactical when what are needed are strategic questions and theologically supported answers. “Stop asking at what age confirmation should be administered; the question is when and under what conditions we should initiate a Christian. Stop asking at what age children should make their first confession; the question is what ecclesial effect sin has on communion in faith.”¹¹³ His statements imply a criticism of the way the Church, particularly the Church in the United States, has tried to deal with implementing the reformed rites of initiation. While tactical questions come from a pastoral sense of cultural sensitivity, they do not adequately address the intent of the reform: renewal of the Church.

In a humorous answer to a tactical question, Fr. Kavanagh explains, “Thus when I am asked at what age we should confirm, I usually answer forty-two…It is irrelevant because we confirm not at an ‘age’ but whenever it is necessary—and baptism is what makes confirmation…necessary.”¹¹⁴ He offers the suggestion that the Church follows the canonical law regarding the age of confirmation, “at the age of discretion, around the seventh year or so, when children are ready for first communion, because the eucharist is the seal of Christian initiation.”¹¹⁵ If the Western Church cannot shake the need for immediate infant baptism as the antidote for original sin, and wait for older children to complete the sacraments of initiation in the same service, it makes most sense to confirm and communicate those baptized as children in order to keep the sacraments in their appropriate order. As he notes, we cannot be tied to an age, children, “must be evangelized as they become capable, catechized so as to bring their nascent faith by

¹¹⁴ Kavanagh, “Principles for Sacramental Catechesis,” 323.
¹¹⁵ Ibid.
appropriate stages to ecclesial term.”\textsuperscript{116} Enrolling older children, who were baptized as infants, in the catechumenate and confirming and communicating them in the same service, would lay the ground work for a maturing faith, supported by parents, sponsors and the Church itself.

This would, of course, remove confirmation from the time of adolescence and this has been problematic from a pastoral sense.\textsuperscript{117} Fr. Kavanagh notes that following the model of Christendom in a post-Christian world does not make sense. The surrounding culture does not support the indoctrination of adolescents into the Church, and confirmation during this time is not enough to break the pull of the world.\textsuperscript{118} “The appropriate catechesis would be to challenge and break down that personality-set; the appropriate sacramental seal to this would be solemn reconciliation to the church rather than confirmation…Exorcism is better here than education, and reconciliation tough and loving is better than confirmation into a socioecclesiastical world that no longer exists.”\textsuperscript{119} He suggests this because the current practice of adolescence confirmation has not made stronger, more mature Christians; rather it has come to be seen as the sacrament of exit from the Church.

By way of conclusion, it is necessary again to elaborate Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of the relationship between baptism and Eucharist. Schmemann seems an appropriate guide in this. “In the early tradition, Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist

\textsuperscript{116} Kavanagh, “Initiating Children,” 41.
\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Lambert Leijssen, \textit{With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit}, (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 2003). Also, Lambert Leijssen, “Confirmation: Status Quaestionis,” in \textit{Confirmation: Origins, History and Pastoral Situation Today}, (Louvain, 1989). Writing from the perspective of postmodernity Leijssen suggests that the pastoral dimension is important enough to keep the celebration of the sacrament in adolescence. As discussed in the following chapter, he does not offer a suggestion of how it would then relate to the sacramental celebration of First Communion.
\textsuperscript{118} Kavanagh, “Initiating Children,” 38.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 41.
‘belong together’, form one liturgical sequence…because each sacrament within it is fulfilled in the other in such a way that it is impossible fully to understand the meaning of one in separation and isolation from the other two.”  

The Eucharist is more than just another sacrament; it is “the sacrament of the Church, i.e. the act in which and for which the Church always ‘becomes that which she is’…if the Church’s ultimate being and essence are revealed in and through the Eucharist…then of necessity to enter the Church is to enter into the Eucharist, then Eucharist is indeed the fulfillment of Baptism.”  

It is more than just our own dignity as Christians that we are reminded of in baptism; baptism and its completion in Eucharist, make the Church.

Fr. Kavanagh explores this theme in a beautifully written article called “The True Believer.” “There can be no doubt that Baptism and Eucharist are the two premier events in the Church’s sacramental life. Not only do all the other sacraments flow from these two, but Baptism is the way the Eucharist begins and the Eucharist is the way Baptism is sustained in the life of the Church.”  

Both of these sacraments allow us to know Christ in different, yet necessarily complimentary ways. “For to know Christ only in terms of bread and wine can be to know him only in the dining room as guest and host…the Lord as guest is readily sentimentalized. The Lord as host is readily transformed into an indulgent therapist of whatever lusts are momentarily ours.”  

One of the ways that the tradition has balanced this type of domestication is by balancing the Eucharist as meal with the Eucharist as sacrifice. When we participate in the Eucharist as meal, we must remember that something has lost its life for us. “However elegant the knowledge of the

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121 Ibid., 117-118.
123 Ibid., 8.
dining room may be, it begins...in the slaughterhouse...we are, in fact, carnivores—a bloody bunch. Sacrifice may have many facets, but it always has a victim.”

The other balance to the ‘hypercivilized’ knowledge of Christ in Eucharist has been through baptism. “Baptism’s knowledge of Christ is that of the bathhouse. It is not a mannered knowledge, for manners, etiquette, and artifice fall away as one takes off one’s clothes.” This type of intimate knowledge can leave us uncomfortable, and this is what it should do. “To know Christ baptismally is to know him in the awesome discovery of conversion.” We are all called to constant conversion through our participation in the liturgy. Conversion includes the uncomfortable realization that we have not lived up to our role as baptized Christians. Renewing our sense of baptism through the evangelizing of catechumens and the celebration of the sacraments of initiation are central to all liturgical renewal. Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology wraps tightly around the actual celebration of the liturgy as that which guides all other theology and which acts as the source of constant spiritual conversion for the Church itself. Baptism, the way we come into the Church, is central to our participation in the liturgy and the way the Church is kept ever in touch with a most intimate knowledge of Christ.

One of the critiques that can be brought to bear on Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is that it looks too much to the past. As noted, he is truly a student of history and historical liturgical understanding; it is perhaps his greatest strength and his greatest weakness. The final chapter will look at this criticism, and others, in an attempt to find relevance in his theology for the contemporary Church. However, a brief note about his historical attitude is warranted at the end of this chapter on his theology of initiation. It should come as no

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125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., 10.
surprise that Fr. Kavanagh reads the renewed rites of initiation as a return to the historical practice of the Church. This is even true in his somewhat controversial hypothesis that confirmation represents a dismissal from one part of the liturgy to the next. As noted above, there are some theologians who interpreted the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* not as a throw-back to history, but as a new rite created with both an eye to tradition and a realization of changing culture. Even with these changes, the question remains whether the Church’s rituals and sacraments remain relevant in the midst of a new culture. Again, while this question will be taken up in earnest in the following chapter, a brief sketch of an answer might prove insightful.

That the Church finds itself in a changed world goes without question; however, no institution, group or culture can ever truly let go of its history. This is not to say that one is slavish to tradition, but instead, that one uses tradition to navigate change in the current context. How can we ever build something new without recourse to the past? As Roman Catholics we believe in the tradition of the Church passed down; we cannot break completely free of tradition. As both Fr. Kavanagh and Schmemann would no doubt agree with, sacraments must be grounded in something more than subjective human experience. Subjective human experience is one of the things that led to a breakdown in liturgical/sacramental practice in the Church and the fear of ritual as noted

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127 See section on confirmation as dismissal above.
129 Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving,* 13. Power introduces his work by explaining that contemporary culture, postmodernity, is a culture of questioning assumptions of the past. “What is in fact to the fore is the disillusionment with modernity’s confidence in reason and the inability of established orders to hold communities or societies together and to forge and foster common and shared meanings and identity.” These established orders include the Church. As noted throughout the presentation on Fr. Kavanagh’s theology, culture was an important component of Fr. Kavanagh’s work (see Chapter two, and the issue of culture in civic/social ritual). However, Fr. Kavanagh’s look at culture seemed to be too narrowly historical; that is, he recognized the impact of culture in the changing liturgy of the past, but seemed to feel that the changes brought to contemporary liturgy from contemporary culture were not of as much value. This is one way in which his thinking stopped short of the postmodern.
by Fr. Kavanagh. To ground the sacraments in anything less than tradition would to have them be completely unmoored. Were this the case, to what would they point? As symbols, they do more than just represent; they point to and make real a relationship between the Church and Christ. This is more than an abstract understanding of a divine presence.

Whether his theology is deep enough, or is in-tune with current culture, Fr. Kavanagh was correct when he expressed his opinion that renewal of the Church can be done through a reinvigorated and re-understood initiatory rite. The sacraments of initiation point to something radical, that has the ability to be made radically new every time the Church assembles around the Table: God, made man, incarnate and entering into human history, sacrificing self to make us whole, dying to take away an eternity of death outside of God’s presence and providing us an icon to understand our own humanity. If anything, the lack of ritual and participation in ritual in the Church has made us seek ritual from other sources. We seek out groups to belong to that support us and help us make sense of reality. The world has not changed so much that people have stopped seeking answers to the transcendent; we have simply stopped seeking them from religion. The question then is whether Fr. Kavanagh’s theology can assist the Church in being relevant.

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130 See Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization: The Case of Western Liturgical Usage,” 70-77.
CHAPTER V
SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE

This final chapter will critique Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology and draw conclusions about its continued relevance in our current time. The preceding synthesis of Fr. Kavanagh’s work drew heavily from his own writings and often from theologians who influenced his understanding of the liturgy. To critique his work, it will be necessary to include other voices. It will turn both to those who agree with Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to liturgy, those who offer direct criticism of his theology, and those voices that have moved beyond his to address contemporary cultural shift. These voices will also include that of the author, who has allowed Fr. Kavanagh’s vision of liturgy to influence her own personal approach to liturgical worship. This personal turn is necessary, for one cannot critique that of which one has no knowledge.

This is one of the lessons to be taken from Fr. Kavanagh’s deeply felt and spiritual approach to liturgy; theologians should allow themselves to be shaped by worship. This is an ideal, and it is uncertain whether this ideal is being met. Fr. Kavanagh himself was aware of how difficult it is for those in the academy to allow themselves to meet this ideal. This is partly due to the nature of academe, and its understanding of scientific truth. “The church’s worship does not merely reflect or

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1 While there isn’t necessarily data on how many theologians allow themselves to be shaped by regular liturgical worship, the issue of theology, theologians and their relationship with the Church is something that Fr. Kavanagh, and other Christian theologians are questioning. In an online article from First Things, Gerald Hiestand laments the drain of theologians from the local parishes and theology from the pastorate to the academy. “The drain of our wider theologians from the pastorate…has resulted in a two-fold problem. First, the theological water-level of our local parishes has dropped considerably…the second part of this problem is perhaps more even troubling. Not only has theology left the church, but the church has left theology.” Gerald Hiestand, “The Pastor as Wider Theologian, or What’s Wrong With Theology Today,” 2011, 2, http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2011/01/the-pastor-as-wider-theologian-or-what-s-wrong-with-theology-today. (accessed July 30, 2011). As he notes in his article, this two-fold problem is evident in all Christian denominations, even his own evangelical Church. He believes that academic theologians have lost their way, in general, and are not focusing on the questions that build the Church.
express its repertoire of faith. It transacts the church’s faith in God under the condition of
God’s real presence in both church and world…The problem presented to me is how to
express all this while maintaining a credible objectivity according to modern standards of
academic scholarship.”\(^2\) It is difficult to offer scholarly evidence of the importance of a
lived and believed faith and have it be accepted as more than religious affect if one is
within the tradition itself. He offers three possible ways to solve this problem. The first
is to leave the academy. He cites Thomas Aquinas as one who took this route. “Some of
them (those who leave the scholarly life) became advocates of a holy Know-Nothingism.
Some of them died from sheer relief.”\(^3\) The second approach is likely the most popular
way, and the way many theologians have taken; the “Christian might stay in academe and
dissimulate belief…They remain in academe and are worn down by it…The
transmutation of faith into some surrogate is often accompanied, furthermore, by
symptoms typical of transitions from one mode of life to another.”\(^4\) There is an element
of conversion here, but it is conversion from the lived and living Word of God to other
areas of thought. Fr. Kavanagh refers to is as succumbing to “the lure of works which
occupy but do not save.”\(^5\)

The third solution is Fr. Kavanagh’s own choice: “[A] Christian stay in academe
and insist that his or her evidence be taken seriously. This is undoubtedly more difficult
to do than the second possibility. It may even be more demanding in some ways than the
first…What the ascetic contemplates, the Christian academic communicates.”\(^6\) This is
the intersection of Church and World and the place of theology as lived experience of the

\(^3\) Ibid., 12.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid., 13.
\(^6\) Ibid.
worshiping Church. A Christian theologian who chooses the third way is a witness to “those modes of God’s presence which are available to professional discourse…to Church and World…World is the fundamental mode in which the Creator manifests himself, infesting it with himself all the while.” The difficulty is having academe and its focus on objectivity take this witness seriously, as more than just personal religious affect. Again, this witness is enacted by the Church in the liturgy, and this is the experience to which the Christian theologian is called.

Of course, in Fr. Kavanagh’s thinking, all worshiping Christians are theologians. It is also important to remember that the majority of Fr. Kavanagh’s writing appeared in the decades immediately following the Second Vatican Council. His criticism of the way the reformed liturgy was enacted may not be as valid to the liturgy as it is enacted today. Some practices criticized by Fr. Kavanagh have been categorized as abuses and have been officially reprobated by the Church.

In the introduction of Redemptionis Sacramentum, Cardinal Arinze, writing for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, notes, “Someone may ask why there should be liturgical norms at all. Would creativity, spontaneity, the freedom of the children of God and ordinary good sense not be enough?…Eucharistic norms are devised to express and protect the Eucharistic mystery and also manifest that it is the Church that celebrates this august sacrifice and Sacrament.”

As noted in Chapter two, Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to

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7 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 14.
9 Francis Cardinal Arinze, “Introduction,” Redemptionis Sacramentum, 3. Several of the abuses highlighted in this document correspond to Fr. Kavanagh’s criticisms explored in previous chapters. An example from Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style, (New York: Pueblo, 1982), 72, includes, “Proliferation of ministers for reasons other than need,” also, 74, “Breaking the bread at the words of institution.” Redemptionis Sacramentum, makes many references to the exceptional role that extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to play in liturgical celebration. In section 158 it is noted, “Indeed the
ecclesiology was suggested to be “from the pews.” Enacting liturgy creates the assembly of the Church, and theology comes from this action. Still, as also pointed out in that chapter, Fr. Kavanagh recognized the need for norms and rubrics in order to be faithful to the liturgical tradition of the Church. When speaking of the study of liturgy in relation to other theologies and canon law, George Worgul notes, “[I]t is important to remember that participation was regulated precisely because participation in rites was ‘dangerous’ if it became indiscriminate.”

In different ways, both Fr. Kavanagh, and Cardinal Arinze are reacting to this dangerous element of liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh would approach it from history and Cardinal Arinze would approach it from hierarchy.

This critique will provide a conclusion to the exploration of Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology by first taking on some of his more challenging insights. One of the foundational themes of Fr. Kavanagh’s criticism of the western liturgy is its focus on the text. This of course is fundamental to his assertion that we have lost the understanding of symbol and sacrament. As he notes, “Eastern worship, on the other hand, tends to be less cerebral and more open to movement, sense experience, contemplation, and individual

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extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking…or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged…a brief prolongation…is not at all sufficient reason.” What is interesting about this example is that this is a practice that should have changed according to the guide put forth in the document. However, this has not necessarily been the case. Many extraordinary ministers are scheduled and used regardless of the size of the assembly at any given mass. Regarding the second example from Elements of Rite, Redemptionis Sacramentum, 55, teaches, “In some places there has existed an abuse by which the Priest breaks the host at the time of the consecration in the Holy Mass. This abuse is contrary to the tradition of the Church.” Some of the innovation following the Second Vatican Council that was later deemed to be abuse includes, “substituting other, non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God.” Redemptionis Sacramentum, 62. Also, “It should be borne in mind that any previous norm that may have admitted non-ordained faithful to give the homily…is to be considered abrogated.” Redemptionis Sacramentum, 65. While some of these practices have changed, it is still possible to find these types of innovation and abuses in various liturgical celebrations.

initiative.” While it is easy to be sympathetic to his argument, especially when explained in his usual passionate manner, the notion of detextualizing the western church is overly-idealistic. While Fr. Kavanagh does not propose to fully detextualize the western liturgy, the cure he proposes, the reintroduction of ritual is offered without thorough examples of how this might be accomplished in religions devoted to the text. This section will look at the current practice of liturgy and its reliance on text. Do proposed liturgical changes address the issue of ritual, or are they merely textual?

A second criticism that Fr. Kavanagh brought to the reformed liturgy and its implementation was the balancing of vertical and horizontal relationships. In his paper presented in The Awakening Church, he took issue with the rite of gathering as it was enacted in American parishes. As he notes, “[I]t is a set of activities not ritually very different from the same procedures used when persons of middle-class society gather for any purpose.” This is part of the embourgeoisement of the Church that leads to viewing liturgy as a personal affair, as a type of therapy. This is most assuredly not Fr. Kavanagh’s view of liturgy. This section will explore the goal of the liturgy. One can glean that Fr. Kavanagh’s theology views liturgy as a goal in itself, and in this he has many supporters. While there are not many theologians who disagree with this approach, there are those who wonder why Fr. Kavanagh’s theology never touches on the action of Christians outside of the liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh talks much about the relationship between the Church and the World, but he stops short of connecting how liturgy should influence the faithful in their daily existence.

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11 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 4.
13 Both Marjorie Procter-Smith and Geoffrey Wainwright make this criticism of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology. Their criticisms will be highlighted in detail below.
The final area of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology to be critiqued will be his approach to theology as *theologia prima* and his understanding of *lex orandi…lex credendi*. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology makes the relationship between the two laws a one way street. This can be problematic for theologians who might take the outside view of liturgy; those who practice a theology of the liturgy rather than liturgical theology. It is especially problematic for the way theology is currently practiced. The distinctions made between different theologies, systematics, dogmatics, moral, liturgical and pastoral, make it hard to accept that doctrine does not govern and guide worship, or at least influence it to some degree. This section will also include a critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of initiation. He is not the only theologian to question the current practice of separating confirmation and Eucharist from initiation, but his approach to confirmation as an ancient form of a dismissal is certainly unique and novel.

Next, Fr. Kavanagh’s theology will be brought into conversation with the current reforms and changes in the liturgy. What would Fr. Kavanagh think of these changes? The original changes made to the liturgy following the Second Vatican Council were different from the viewpoint of history not because the liturgy changed, but in the manner it changed. “For one thing, no ritual system in the history of world religions has ever undergone such substantial changes as those the council precipitated over the past quarter-century, or at so rapid a rate.”\(^\text{14}\) Change has always occurred in the liturgy, but that change has usually been slow, evolutionary and following from practice; that is, it has historically been ‗bottom up’ change as opposed to ‗top down’. Would Fr. Kavanagh view the current changes in the language of worship as part of the natural evolution of liturgy, or would he see it as another change in the text imposed by authority? The

\(^{14}\) Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 84.
answer is not straight-forward, and a hypothesis will be formed based upon his own critique of the initial reformed liturgy.

Fr. Kavanagh’s relevance to contemporary issues in liturgical theology will be addressed throughout this critique. A final section will address the questions of postmodern theology that have come to the forefront since the time of Fr. Kavanagh’s scholarship. While Fr. Kavanagh was certainly not a postmodern thinker, the subject of liturgy lends itself to some of the concerns of postmodernity. Questions of God’s presence and mode in which it is communicated are areas of concern for both liturgical and postmodern theology. As noted by David Power, “One can hardly address any field of human enterprise and knowledge today…without taking the debates about the postmodern into account. This may be to take a stand against it, it may be to foster it, it may be to accommodate it, but ignore it, one cannot.” Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to symbol and sacrament, his understanding of icon and his being influenced by Eastern theology are all points that provide conversation between his theology and that of postmodernity. Other contemporary issues that will be treated briefly include issues of cultural difference in the liturgy and ecumenism. Does Fr. Kavanagh’s theology have anything to add to these contemporary issues?

**Detextualization: Overly-idealistic?**

In his book, *On Liturgical Theology*, Fr. Kavanagh notes some things about himself in order to show the reader his biases. He notes that as a liturgical scholar, he is “more at home in the iconic East than in the pictorial West. Pictures are about meaning. Icons are about being.” Fr. Kavanagh is expressing a traditionally modern view of

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icons based on his own understanding of symbol and sacrament.\(^{17}\) Icons, as symbols, are about being according to Fr. Kavanagh because they make God present.\(^{18}\) This is why Fr. Kavanagh finds more affinity with the east; the liturgy is enacted in the language of sacrament. Sacraments are icons that make God present.\(^{19}\) The symbolic and iconic in his perspective communicates more than the meaning of texts or pictures; they communicate God’s actual presence.\(^{20}\) The Western approach to liturgy “tends to exploit meaning in such raw and aggressive quantity that congregations often are reduced to passivity, seated in pews with texts before them in order to give their full attention to the meaning purveyed in the service.”\(^{21}\) While this is not a new phenomenon, he does argue that the focus on the text grew out of Scholasticism and exploded during the reformation\(^ {22}\), it is certainly one that he ties to his critique of the liturgy of the Second Vatican Council.

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\(^{17}\) See Chapter two. Symbol and sacrament are a language that reveals the reality of God. George Worgul and Lambert Leijssen would attribute this understanding of icon and symbol to the interpersonal-encounter model or vision of sacraments. [Cf. George Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God.” Cf. Lambert Leijssen, With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit, chapter two.]


\(^{19}\) See Chapter two, 45. Both Schmemann and Fr. Kavanagh agree that the symbol does not fully capture the reality it symbolizes. Schmemann, The Eucharist, 39. “The symbol is always partial, always imperfect.”

\(^{20}\) A contemporary, postmodern approach to sacraments and icons would say that icons are less about real presence than they are about the ‘other’ god, the absent God. Cf. Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” 15. “The present God always remains an absent God…who nonetheless leaves traces of having been here and promise of return.” Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of presence is not incompatible with the postmodern view. The icon and the sacrament are still about meaning, but the meaning is explicitly on God’s terms, not ours.

\(^{21}\) Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 4.

\(^{22}\) Aidan Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization: The Case of Western Liturgical Usage,” 72. Even though literacy rates during the Middle Ages and the reformation were certainly not as high as they are in contemporary society, Fr. Kavanagh considers the twelfth-century onward as the base for the new intellectualism. “One root was…(the) renaissance of learning, the founding of medieval universities thereafter, and the flourishing of Scholasticism with its emphasis on texts and adversarial sententiae.” Literacy continued to grow and ability to print the Bible quickly and in the vernacular during the reformation is what caused focus on the text to explode. The explosion of texts helped to fuel the Reformation Churches’ insistence that the relationship was between Scripture and the individual, rather than between the community and ritual.
Fr. Kavanagh’s use of the word “passivity” above deserves attention. Conscious and active participation in the liturgy is what contemporary Christians are called to, yet Fr. Kavanagh suggests that the liturgy is still concerned with text rather than ritual. Perhaps Fr. Kavanagh defines “active participation” differently than the contemporary Church and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Being influenced by the East, Fr. Kavanagh would embrace the kinesthetic experience of Orthodox liturgy, and the way sacred texts “often emerge as poetry.”23 Active participation is less about understanding all of the words of liturgy and more about being caught up in the ritual performance of the event and the inexhaustible meaning derived from such an experience.

As noted in Chapter two, Fr. Kavanagh highlights the great, moving urban liturgies of the ancient Church as a form of worship and type of devotion that we cannot even imagine today.24 He explains that one of the reasons for the urban liturgy had to do with the Christianization of Rome after Constantine. “After his conversion to Christ, Constantine attempted to alter the ancient cult of Rome by insinuating Christian places of worship into the ceremonial center of the city. The old pagan establishment successfully resisted this attempt, forcing the emperor to build his churches only in Rome’s suburbs.”25 As Christianity slowly gained a foothold in the urban area, the churches were necessarily small, and unable to accommodate the assembly gathered around their bishop.26 This gave rise to the public, moving liturgies over the whole of a Sunday. Whether those caught up in the procession and singing correctly understood the doctrine

23 Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 73. He notes especially the experience in the Byzantine liturgy and the singing the Beatitudes. He notes, “The sacred text is not worried over or flung at the participants. The music and acts of ritual reverence attending it, rather, timorously unveil the sacred text, sensually and seductively arrayed in loveliness of sound and act, in the midst of the entire assembly.”
24 See Chapter two, 40.
25 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 64.
26 Ibid., 65-66.
of the Church or the correct meanings behind each of the readings was less important than the physical experience of the ritual itself. Active participation, as opposed to passivity, has more to do with the unfolding of meaning rather than the complete engagement with the intellectual process. Ritual meaning overflows intellectual ability and cannot be quantified.

In his paper in *The Awakening Church*, Fr. Kavanagh reminisced about the Tridentine Liturgy, while reminding his readers that he was fully committed to the reformed liturgy. What he reminisced about had less to do with the way the liturgy was enacted, and more to do with the egalitarianism and personal piety that suffering such liturgies brought to the assembly. “I have seen philosopher and charwoman kneeling side by side at such Masses; she with her Missal, he with his rosary, both of them offering up their priest to God along with their love and sins.” Both worshipers sought meaning, but as their participation in Mass was not required or encouraged, they were each free to access meaning and worship in their own manner: she with her text and he with his action of prayer. The reformed liturgy does not allow for this approach to meaning. In a way, meaning is forced on the assembly. “It is as though their celebrants expect various meanings to be completely yielded up on the doing of each ritual and to be completely absorbed in an approved manner by each participant.”

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27 Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 91. He notes, “Those were the days when the main liturgical rubric was minimalism, piety was something else, and liturgy had nothing theological about it except in the form and matter required for the valid confection of the sacraments.”

28 Ibid., 92. Fr. Kavanagh is suggesting that while their active participation was not necessary in the contemporary sense, the meaning of the ritual was still available to them through their personal piety. Also, the egalitarian nature of their worship is something that seems to be missing in the contemporary liturgy.

29 Ibid., 95.
captive, rather than always active, participation the norm in liturgy leaves little room for the reservoirs of meaning that symbols, icons and rituals are able to produce.

Fr. Kavanagh was not the only theologian writing for *The Awakening Church* who noted some issue with textuality and meaning. Ronald Grimes noted that the liturgies observed for the study\textsuperscript{30} did not pay enough attention to ritual knowledge and the way ritual is communicated through all of the senses.\textsuperscript{31} He continues, “[W]ord and thought dominate…the connections are largely intellectual…they seem to imply and require pages and print to be received. Not only do some liturgists seem inherently tied to intellectual thematizing, they seem wed to direct, didactic statement.”\textsuperscript{32} He uses the example of the readings and the homily. If the homily tells the assembly what the readings mean, this implies that “in neither reading nor homily is the story felt to be sufficient unto itself.”\textsuperscript{33} Somehow, the need to explain the Gospel puts it beyond life. Instead of being a never empty reservoir of meaning which can be accessed limitlessly, the Gospel becomes a text that must be understood intellectually.

Don Saliers also faults the weakening of symbolic understanding. “We know, in theory at least, that enacted liturgy, while trafficking in texts, is much more than texts…In our haste to render the liturgy intelligible and accessible to the worshipers, we easily neglect the complex matter of participation in symbol and symbolic efficacy.”\textsuperscript{34} We must all ‘get it’ to ensure that the meaning of the liturgy was successful. Active participation in the liturgy is about more than singing and responding correctly. It is

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\textsuperscript{30} The study visited fifteen parishes in the English-speaking American Church, and documented reactions to the changes in liturgy. For more information on the study, please see the introductory section of *The Awakening Church*.

\textsuperscript{31} Grimes, 22.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} Saliers, “Symbol in Liturgy, Liturgy as Symbol: The Domestication of Liturgical Experience,” 70-71.
more than following along with the readings and listening to the homily for scriptural interpretation. Associating active participation with intellectual understanding is what each of these three theologians criticize in the reformed liturgy. Ritual and the role of symbol are underplayed in favor of instant meaning. Alternatively, one can be said to have actively participated even if the full import of the Gospel reading is not felt until the following week, in a moment of reflection, or in an encounter with another person.

Liturgy as symbol, without the expectation of immediately understood meaning, has the power to convey the real mystery that liturgy represents. As Saliers puts it, “What is less evident is how the modes of participation are related to the primary mystery of encounter with God’s self-giving in word and sacramental sign-actions.”

Solely intellectual understanding and intellectual participation cannot plumb these depths.

What these comments point to is the need to let certain elements of the liturgy ‘speak for themselves’, and while the author is in agreement with this, it should be noted that none of the three theologians who made this critique offer much concrete advice on how best this is to be done. Saliers and Grimes talk about the need for renewing symbolic language. Fr. Kavanagh insists that deritualization can be overcome with order, specifically ritual order. “God does not need canon and order and discipline, but we do, and those of us who bear some responsibility for liturgical worship owe our colleagues in

35 Saliers, 71.
36 Saliers is not suggesting that the intellect is not necessary in liturgy, but rather a complete understanding of the experience of God requires access to symbolic and sacramental thinking in addition to intellectual understanding of the teachings and doctrine of the Church. (Cf. chapter two and Schmemann’s explanation about the loss of symbolic thinking.) As to the postmodern assertion of the death of symbol, it is easy to see humanity still needs symbols, but they are of a secular or pseudo-religious nature. The symbols of status such as clothing brands (decorated with company logos) or luxury cars, or the ubiquitous ‘smart phone’ pervade society. Theologians such as Kavanagh, Grimes and Saliers would argue that the Western Church’s turn to intellectualism has led to a weakening of symbolic thought and action in liturgy. The symbols have become irrelevant because we do not know to what they point.
faith our best efforts to become masters of all three.” What he is expressing is the need for rituals to be about ritual, i.e., symbolic, knowledge rather than intellectual knowledge. This also requires greater access to symbolic thinking. One way to support symbolic thinking is through silence and contemplation. Grimes notes, “What I longed for most at the end of my imagined participant observation of a post-Vatican II liturgy was sustained silence, genuine stillness, and the curvature of liturgical indirection.” This need for silence, written about twenty years ago, is a topic that has become important in the last several years.

Pope Benedict XVI has made it a point of his writing and his liturgical celebration to encourage and include sustained silence and prayer in liturgy. The importance of silence is tied to his focus on a renewed interest in Eucharistic adoration. Eucharistic adoration will be discussed in depth in the next section but it is worthy to note how Pope Benedict’s call for silence is in line with the critique of liturgy made twenty years ago by Grimes. One of the themes of the Pope’s message to Catholic youth has been to practice prayerful silence. “[M]ake space for silence, because it is in silence that we find God.”

He explains that the silence of prayer takes discipline, and he recommends that it

37 Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 77. As mentioned in chapter two, Fr. Kavanagh paraphrases Urban Holmes by remarking that “good liturgy verges on the edge of chaos,” 39. Discipline is not part of God’s making, but rather our way to experience the all-encompassing God. If the liturgy is of God and the liturgy verges on chaos, it would suggest that our experience of God takes us to the edge of the gulf of the divine that is utterly beyond comprehension. Such a gulf would seem to us to be chaos. In this way, Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is not opposed to the postmodern concern for the absence of God. God’s presence is mediated only on God’s terms and in such a way that the symbols (icons) so used express also God’s absence. The gulf of the divine is this absence.

38 Grimes, 23.

39 The practice of Eucharistic adoration will be examined to see if it is a corrective to Fr. Kavanagh’s criticism that the liturgy has become ‘too horizontal’.

is done daily.\textsuperscript{41} But individual prayer is not the only place for silence. As reported by uscatholic.org, “Pope Benedict has insisted that real, even prolonged moments of silence be added to every liturgy he celebrates.”\textsuperscript{42} This seems to be an example answering the need articulated by Grimes above. Pope Benedict’s example notwithstanding, the question remains about how to best accomplish this in the current liturgy?

As someone who has attended various liturgies in various parts of the United States, I would like to offer some observations and critiques of these points. First, it should be said that any retreat from the text in the Western Church is overly-idealistic. That said, I do not believe that Fr. Kavanagh suggests that we put away all texts, but it is certainly clear that he decries the passivity of sitting and receiving in our current liturgy. That he would prefer the Eastern approach to liturgy and its physicality and kinesthetic openness is no secret. While it is normal in the West to engage in prayer and contemplation at the various side altars before mass, it would be considered inappropriate to do so once the service had begun. As free movement is not something that can be reclaimed in the West, another option would be to try and remove oneself from the text of liturgy and simply try to experience what unfolds. The ability to do this depends greatly upon the specific church and its ritual practices.

The use of Missalettes and lectionaries in my home diocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin has decreased greatly since I was a child and young adult. I remember daily Mass in grade school and checking with those around me to make sure I was on the correct page for the day’s liturgy. It seemed a great privilege to read along with Father,

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
and it represented the only exposure most of my class had to Scripture. This was the case for most of my formative years. The common ‘ritual’ for those attending Mass was to enter the Church silently, genuflect, offer a prayer of thanks and forgiveness in preparation and then find and mark the page in the Missalette for the day. One can only imagine what entering the church during the first reading would have looked like: heads bowed not in prayer but in faithful reading of the same Bible passage being read. This practice had begun to change by the time I left to pursue doctoral studies. In Pittsburgh, I found that the churches I attended all had a hymnal and a lectionary available in the pews. I immediately fell back into the habit of marking the readings for the day and following along. What I noticed, however, was that fewer people had their heads bent forward in reading. Many people sat in these churches with access to the printed word but chose to listen to the word being read. In the spirit of Fr. Kavanagh, I put down my book. What I found is that it was very difficult to hear and understand the reading. Even in the West, churches are not terribly quite places. People shift in their seats and cough, children ask questions and drop toys, babies cry or laugh, and when this is combined with a poor reader, or with a priest with a heavy accent, comprehending the spoken word is very difficult.

These experiences made me question my own approach to liturgy. Is the purpose of the liturgy of the Word to ‘teach’ me the readings of the day? Should I listen to the Word read aloud in order to form an opinion on Paul’s theology or is there something deeper, beyond the spoken word, to which I should be attuned? Fr. Kavanagh, Grimes and Saliers each believe that we have lost the ability to understand symbol and the
importance of ritual, but how can this be changed? Putting away the Missalettes and lectionaries is a good place to start, but more must be done to open the assembly for the real purpose of the readings and the Gospel. Grimes is correct in suggesting silence. There are many more pauses in current liturgical practice than even twenty years ago. But these pauses, after the readings, after the responsorial psalm, after the Gospel and the homily, are still short. If one were to time them, they would be less than three full beats. Silence makes us uncomfortable, yet silence (even ‘silence’ that includes shifting people and crying babies), or better the absence of spoken words, is what is needed to allow the import of the liturgy of the Word take full effect. Just because one did not hear every word read does not mean that one cannot realize that they were in the presence of God’s Word. As much as the readings and the Gospels are meant to pass on theology and doctrine they are also meant to remind us of God’s unbreakable relationship with creation. God has given us these words as God’s Word.

43 I agree with the arguments presented by these theologians. In questioning my own liturgical assumptions, I realized that understanding the readings was less important than understanding my role as assembling as the Church. While the Liturgy of the Word is literal and intellectual, it is also symbolic as it helps to focus the assembly on the Word of God; the same Word that will be sacramentally broken and sacrificed in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The ritual of the Liturgy of the Word is as important as the literal reading of the Word.

44 Fr. Kavanagh suggests that not only silence, but even in some ways the Liturgy itself should make us uncomfortable. Speaking of the embourgeoisement of the Church he notes, “By this time western liturgy had forsaken the radical, austere, and daunting values of the Gospel and inculturated itself amidst the softer neuroses of a suburbanized middle class. Instead of the old liturgy’s adamant transcendentalism, which focused almost entirely on an alarming deity before whom one stood only in solidarity with the Crucified, the new liturgy seemed to bathe us with assurances.” Kavanagh, “Textuality and Deritualization,” 74.

45 Much as educational theory and the neurosciences are helping us understand that learning happens after we have encountered new material, in play or creative pursuits, during sleep, silence is one of the ways to transition from the intellectual activity of listening and create what Saliers refers to as ‘depth of emotion’. He contrasts with the ‘immediacy of feeling’, the initial reaction a congregant has to the readings and prayers of liturgy. “Thus, immediacy of feeling must be distinguished from depth of emotion. It is the ‘depth of emotion’ that only shows up over time. Only when connections such as the above (referencing a person’s subjective life experience) are made in human existence and in our struggles to live the Christian life, alone and together, can we begin to discern the way in which the symbols form and express the Christian pattern of affections…[T]he deeper questions appear only when we allow worshipers to speak about how the liturgy has formed them in deep dispositions over time.” Saliers, “Symbol in Liturgy, Liturgy as Symbol,” 78.
The issue of silence is still relevant in contemporary liturgical and sacramental theology that takes postmodernity into account. One of the ways that postmodern theology can speak of sacrament and presence without introducing issues of Being and metaphysics is to speak of sacrament as language and event. David Power treats the issue of silence briefly in his exposition of sacrament as language event. He notes, “Language is the expression of intent.” Intent, and knowing our intent, means that we must be aware of the “inner word.” He explains that the inner word is not just concepts and images that we will verbalize. “It might better be spoken of as quest, as the desire to know and love, but whose outlet and expression is spoken and written language.” Language is the intersection of the world in which we live and our own intent. “Humans need the times of silence for two reasons. First, they need to gather in what language says and to reflect upon it. Second they need the silence to be in touch with the intent of the heart.” These points have a concern for the postmodern understanding of language, but they also have practical application to the practice of silence in liturgy reflected on above. The need for reflection, on the Word read aloud in liturgy as well as on the action and ritual of Eucharist requires silence rather than explanation. Through this silence and reflection, the assembly can begin to understand how the liturgical action influences their “inner word,” their intent in liturgy and as a Christian. This has the possibility of changing, and deepening the language they use in subsequent liturgical celebrations, as well as allowing the liturgy to influence their interactions with the world.

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47 Ibid. 73.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 74.
Finally, in an effort to break the didactic nature of current liturgy, it must be suggested that there should be less explanation in worship. The homily need not always be an extended lesson of biblical interpretation. While it is ‘nice’ that the homily helps to relate the readings to life, it is not always necessary. To be quite honest, there are times when the interpretation of Scripture offered during the homily is suspect, better that the homily be used to move the assembly’s thoughts to their purpose at liturgy. It is the assembly that constitutes the Church and a homily that reminds us of this purpose and responsibility might do more to foster symbolic understanding. Similarly, it seems that these problems are known, but liturgists do not always know how to address them. Before the Lord’s Prayer, Fr. Charlie (my parish priest) says, “in light of the starving children in the world, let us pray for our daily bread in the words Jesus taught us.” This is a wonderful sentiment, and certainly a reminder that the world goes beyond the confines of St. Jude the Apostle Parish. However, would it be better to let the assembly come to that connection independently? Need he ‘spell it out’? Would a homily touching on God’s ability to overcome our sinful and selfish nature, combined with intercessory prayers for those who hunger not plant the seeds for the assembly to make that connection at some point? It should be acceptable that meaning develops over time. This is the deepening of faith.

Chauvet suggests that this didactic tendency is part of our mindset. “For us Westerners, always bent upon mastering the world by dint of ideas, it is difficult to accept this type of language (ritual), more behavioral (and pragmatic) than mental (and semantic). We are prone to explaining symbols rather than letting them do their work.
But to explain a symbol is to demonstrate that it does not function as a symbol.\(^5\) In the example of the Lord’s prayer noted above, Chauvet might suggest that that not only does the symbol, praying for our daily bread, not need to be explained, it is best not to explain because of the nature of the “spareness”\(^5\) of symbols. “Because its performance does not depend on its ‘value’, the symbol is discreet…In this, the symbol shows…it is the real and it is not the real at the same time.”\(^5\) This is part of the language of postmodern liturgical understanding, yet it is not opposed to Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of ritual and language. Chauvet presents that the symbol makes present, yet also points to absence of that symbolized because the entirety of that which the symbol represents cannot be contained in the symbol. To explain the notion of daily bread is to try and contain that which it symbolizes (our dependence upon God, the graciousness of God, etc.) in the ritual action of praying the Lord’s Prayer. Not only does this take away its symbolic nature, but it also limits the activity of the assembly in growing in the experience how God provides, and how sometimes it seems that God does not provide. The liturgy as an enactment of faith should allow for all members to grow in deeper understanding. We do not all need to ‘get it’ at every service.

**The Goal of Liturgy**

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\(^{51}\) Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, (Collegeville, M.N.: The Liturgical Press, 2001,) 100. Chauvet’s purpose in this section is to show that ritual is a language that uses symbol. This language is not scientific or meant to be studied, but is “operative” and meant to be active. As he notes, “That the liturgy is seen as the place not for discourse on God but for reception of God’s action corresponds in depth to what the Bible understands by ‘word of God’; this is not an abstract word, such as the Greek *logos*, but a word which is *action and event.*” Ibid. Cf. Chapter two, section on ritual and Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of ritual as performative language, summarized in the following manner: “Ritual communicates these values through shared experience rather than through rational discourse and assent.”

\(^{52}\) Chauvet, 101.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
The criticisms of an intellectualized and didactic liturgy above, point to the need to articulate the goal of liturgy. Liturgies that attempt to drive home meaning through language and direct statement seem to have indoctrination and assent as their goal. The purpose of the liturgy becomes a lesson on Church doctrine and right belief. This is certainly not the understanding Fr. Kavanagh brings to the liturgy. As mentioned in previous chapters, he felt that liturgy is the last place one should find formal, structured religious education. This relates to an assumption about liturgy that Fr. Kavanagh finds dangerous, and it has everything to do with the loss of ritual and symbol. The assumption is that worship must be meaningful and relevant; an assumption that predicates the didactic communication mentioned above. Speaking of symbols, he explains, “They consciously include rather than exclude ambiguity because the human experience of reality is itself ambiguous, ambivalent, and tentative.” The reformed liturgy seems to have a need for self-justification, every word must have a precise meaning, and this obscures the goal of liturgy as an act of worship of the living God. It is not only the need to justify worship doctrinally that causes the lack of symbolic understanding. It is also the lessening focus on the vertical dimension of liturgy in preference to the horizontal.

The shift from a vertical focus to a horizontal focus in liturgy can be seen historically. In an article on the spirituality of the American Church, Fr. Kavanagh explained the historical rise of the vertical focus and the way the reformed liturgy shifted to a horizontal focus. As he points out in his article, the vertical focus on God found in the liturgy grew during the medieval era.

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54 See Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite* and “Teaching Through the Liturgy,”
devotions filled the spiritual gap left by liturgy and presbyterate that had become overly cultic; that is, the laity was not expected to participate in liturgy or Eucharist, as they were too sinful to do so. “In short, the classic New Testament and patristic concept of God present incarnately and corporately among men in the world shifted, under historical and cultural pressures, to one of a God present to men from outside the world and often in spite of it.” Klauser notes that the shift in vertical focus was also evident in Church architecture and communion practice. Over the centuries, the position of the altar shifted from being situated in such a way that people could walk around it to being placed at the back wall of the apse so that the celebrant had his back to the congregation. The altar also became more cluttered and made it more difficult for the faithful to follow the Eucharistic action. “From all this it follows that the new additions to the altar probably came in just at the time that the mass was beginning to be regarded as more or less exclusively priestly action; and it is also certain that, vice versa, these changes concerning the altar…were fundamental in altering people’s interpretation of the rite.”

The changes in church architecture happened as communion became less frequent, as the private mass became more frequent and as venerating the Blessed Sacrament became the norm for the faithful’s interaction with the Body of Christ.

The spirituality described by Fr. Kavanagh above, in his reference to the Tridentine mass, was not the historical ‘norm’ of worship, but one that developed over

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1969), 211. Cf. Klauser, A Short History of the Western Liturgy, 149. “During the Gothic period the church building, therefore, is both as a whole and in its individual parts the reflection of the change in the devotional habits of the faithful and of the continuation of this process of disintegration we have already observed (referring to breaking of the community from its liturgical life).”

57 Kavanagh, “Spirituality in the American Church,” 211.
58 Klauser, 100.
59 Ibid. He explains that in the ancient churches there was no crucifix or candles placed on the altar itself.
60 Klauser, 101.
61 See Klauser. The Feast of Corpus Christi is just one example of the way in which the focus of liturgy was shifted more towards the vertical.
time as the laity was removed from participation in liturgy. The reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council attempted a corrective of this attitude by reaffirming the importance of the Christian community in relation to the cultic act of liturgy, yet they did not achieve the proper balance. This balance is required because of the nature of God revealed to us through Jesus Christ. “There is nothing unusual about a deity being fearsome. Deities are well known for this quality. Nor is there anything unusual about a deity consoling its devotees. But there does seem to be something unusual about the way in which the God of Jesus Christ is fearsome with such tenderness, consoling with such towering justice.” Fr. Kavanagh points out that one of the reasons the balance has not been achieved is due to the way the reforms were carried out. “The method of carrying out cultic changes by authoritative decree, and the rigid retention of the same emphases on the numinous in ceremonial details…together have caused conflicting tensions in the evolution both of new worship patterns and the spirituality they are geared to produce in the community at large.” If the focus of the medieval and Tridentine masses had been too vertical, Fr. Kavanagh suggests that the corrective has allowed the focus to become too horizontal.

The focus on the community has eclipsed the focus on God. “Until a few years ago, we Roman Catholics spoke of the mass as a producer of grace: now we speak of it as a producer of community.” The exclusive focus on community is what Fr. Kavanagh criticizes in his assessment of the enacted liturgy. Again, he is not necessarily criticizing the corrective to the overly cultic attitude prior to Vatican II, but rather its implementation. He notes that historically, the entry rites were the most malleable in

62 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 119.
63 Ibid., 212.
liturgy. They evolved in response to the growing size of churches. The purpose of the rites was “to put the assembly in a condition to stand before God in a radical act of obedience to him for the life of the world, that is, by accomplishing a *leitourgia*.” The rite of gathering as exemplified in the study done for *The Awakening Church* has shifted this focus. “Indeed, the bustle and noise of gathering would probably rule out *vertical* prayer by individuals before the service.” In his estimation, the focus of liturgy as enacted is the gathering. More time and attention is given to the social aspects of liturgy such as gathering and hospitality before the service and the social time following the service than is given to the thoughtful execution of the liturgy itself.

This is a topic that has recently received focus by Church hierarchy. Pope Benedict XVI has taken up the case for a renewed focus on prayer, asceticism, and silence (as mentioned above). In *Sacramentum caritatis*, he explains how active participation of the faithful in the liturgy can be encouraged. It is also interesting to note that active participation in his teaching has less to do with the external than with the internal, personal condition of the individual. “This inner disposition can be fostered, for example, by recollection and silence for at least a few moments before the beginning of the liturgy, by fasting and, when necessary, by sacramental confession.” He does not

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65 Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 86.  
66 Ibid., 86  
67 Ibid., 87.  
68 It is important to point out that Fr. Kavanagh’s criticisms of the Rite of Gathering have to be seen in light of trying to balance the vertical and horizontal aspects of liturgy. Throughout the article in *The Awakening Church*, he questions the way the rite is carried out, “[I]t is a set of activities not ritually very different from the same procedures used when persons of middle-class society gather for any purpose.” Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 87. It is a type of forceful community building that is based on a set of values that he has criticized as not necessarily being in line with the values of the Church, what he refers to as *embourgeoisement*. (See Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*). While his criticism might be overly pointed, it is safe to say that his historical sense of the liturgy and his focus on the action of liturgy as *theologia prima* would understand that it is the community gathered that enacts the liturgy.  
69 Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 2007,
explicitly criticize the gathering rites, as Fr. Kavanagh did, but it seems to be implied that he is recommending a renewed relationship with the vertical dimensions of liturgy.\footnote{Cf. Power, \textit{Sacrament: The Language of God’s Giving}, 30. Citing theologians who are reacting against certain postmodern assumptions, Power explains that then Cardinal Ratzinger, criticized the use of sociological categories in the liturgy. “He is persuaded that far too much attention is given to the human group in liturgical practice, whereas it is the mystery of the Church which ought to prevail.” This is another point of agreement between Fr. Kavanagh’s mature theology and Pope Benedict.}

Another element of the Pope’s exhortation on the Eucharist that can be compared to Fr. Kavanagh is his focus on mystagogy\footnote{\textit{Sacramentum Caritatis}, 64.} As mentioned above, Fr. Kavanagh did not think that the liturgy was a place for formal education. However, mystagogical formation has historic roots in the whole process of conversion and initiation. Analyzing the \textit{RCIA}, and its relation to the historic practice of the Church, Fr. Kavanagh explains the structure of the process, “It extends back into the whole process by which faith is conceived in an individual through evangelization, nurtured by catechesis… sealed by the tripartite sacramental event of baptism-confirmation-eucharist and…brought to a certain cognitive and emotional term in postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy. The whole sequence is Church-wide not merely in theory but in practice.” Mystagogy is a vital part of both initiation and continued conversion that is properly the role of the Church, specifically of the Church gathered in worship. Pope Benedict considers mystagogy to be important in helping the faithful cultivate the inner disposition necessary for active participation.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 64.} “In particular, it must first be said that ‘the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well.’”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, he cites the Synod Fathers’ proposition following the Synod in 2005.} Fr. Kavanagh would certainly be in agreement with this understanding of mystagogical catechesis. The Pope also notes that this catechesis must “be concerned
with presenting the meaning of the signs contained in the rites."\(^{74}\) Part of Fr. Kavanagh’s critique on textualization is that it has stripped us of the ability to understand the symbolic. While Fr. Kavanagh might agree that catechesis needs to make “the faithful more sensitive to the language of signs and gestures,”\(^{75}\) he might approach it in a different manner. Pope Benedict suggests that this type of mystagogy be carried out in more of a ‘top down’ manner; it is the hierarchy’s role to begin this type of catechesis and to empower those responsible for religious formation. Fr. Kavanagh, would most likely argue that mystagogy is best carried out in the worshiping assembly through participation in the liturgy.\(^{76}\)

Mystagogy and silence are two of the ways in which Pope Benedict is encouraging the vertical focus of liturgy. And these are both practices that would seem to agree with Fr. Kavanagh’s critique of a horizontal focus in the reformed liturgy. Another example of this renewed focus on the vertical is Pope Benedict’s continued revival of the practice of Eucharistic adoration. This practice could be seen as the pinnacle of a vertical focus in worship. It combines all the elements mentioned so far: asceticism, prayer, silence and a renewed understanding of sign. Comparing the Pope’s focus on Eucharistic adoration with Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is a bit difficult as Fr. Kavanagh did not write on the subject in any detail.\(^{77}\) However, the practice deserves attention because it represents

\(^{74}\) Sacramentum Caritatis, 64. Cf. Power, Sacrament: The Language of God’s Giving. There is a potential problem with the simplicity suggested by the Pope’s statement. Signs and symbols are culturally conditioned and take on a variety of meanings within different cultures. Pope Benedict is assuming that signs and their meaning are universal and based on a static foundation.

\(^{75}\) Sacramentum Caritatis, 64.

\(^{76}\) This assumption is made given Fr. Kavanagh’s focus on the liturgical assembly as the locus of theologia prima.

\(^{77}\) Eucharistic adoration is mentioned in one article, “Spirituality in the American Church,” and mentioned as a practice that came out of the increased clericalization of the liturgy, 202-203. Also, as mentioned in Chapters 1-3, Fr. Kavanagh chose to focus on the liturgy and sacraments of initiation rather than exclusively focus on the Eucharist.
shifting the focus of worship from the horizontal to the vertical. Pope Benedict relates Eucharistic adoration to understanding the sign and sacrament celebrated in Mass.\textsuperscript{78} He notes that there is an “intrinsic relationship between eucharistic celebration and eucharistic adoration.”\textsuperscript{79} He presents the practice of adoration as one means to cultivate the inner disposition necessary for active participation. Adoration fell out of practice for a time following the liturgical renewal of Vatican II. “[T]he inherent relationship between Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not always perceived with sufficient clarity.”\textsuperscript{80} Practices such as encouraging frequent communion and giving the assembly access to the cup took precedence over the practice of Eucharistic adoration.\textsuperscript{81}

While Fr. Kavanagh certainly critiqued an overly horizontal focus in liturgy, particularly that which seemed to focus on secular, middle-class values, he was not calling for a shift to the vertical, but rather to reestablishing a balance. According to Fr. Kavanagh the overly vertical focus of liturgy was that which ultimately led to the faithful not being able to understand signs and symbol, or to be engaged in the actual liturgical event.\textsuperscript{82} The practice of Eucharistic adoration grew in response to the faithful becoming passive spectators rather than active worshipers.\textsuperscript{83} To be fair, Pope Benedict is recommending the practice in conjunction with worship and participation in Mass, not as


\textsuperscript{79} Sacramentum Caritatis, 66.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} It is very interesting to note that the two practices highlighted were seen as correctives to an overly clerical/vertical focus in liturgy. One can question whether the Pope’s focus is to restore balance, liturgy and prayer that is both vertical and horizontal, or whether there is a perceived need for the vertical relationship to be considered primary.

\textsuperscript{83} One example of his thoughts on this is in “Spirituality in the American Church.” “It may be observed in general that the effect of these medieval patterns of worship (based on the various schools of spirituality) was to link imperceptibly the majority of Christian to the tradition of ecclesial worship in an attenuated manner at best. This attenuated relationship eventually came to be sustained by forms of popular devotions, especially those in veneration of the reserved Sacrament and of the saints.” 203.

\textsuperscript{83} Kavanagh, “Spirituality in the American Church,” 203.
a replacement for communion. However, one may conclude that Fr. Kavanagh would not necessarily be in support of this renewed practice, particularly in light of his historical understanding of liturgical worship and his focus on the liturgy as *theologia prima*. The practice itself may have too much baggage to adequately balance the horizontal and vertical elements of liturgy.

The preceding excursion into these renewed practices is important to highlight that neither Fr. Kavanagh, nor Saliers and Grimes, seem to be suggesting that the goal of community is the problem. It is the nature of the community and its purpose that seems to be misunderstood. As mentioned in chapter three, Ronald Grimes agrees that the reformed liturgy seeks to create a community founded more on middle-class values than on the Christian call to worship. Practices like ministers of hospitality and holding hands during the Lord’s Prayer, “cannot bear the load that people heap upon them…They express deep and authentic desires for sustained physical contact and social interaction, but we ought to be saddened when people speak of them as highlights of the service…Cordiality, however nice, does not nourish, and it is no substitute for spiritual connectedness…and the kinesic congruence that comes from sustained bodily engagement together.”  

If the Second Vatican Council sought to correct a view that humanity was sinful beyond repair and in need of mediated contact with the divine, one would imagine that the nature of the community they sought had less to do with hospitality than it did with the awesome responsibility of the Christian community in constituting the Church.

A corrective to the polite and cordial community criticized by both Fr. Kavanagh and Grimes is a renewed understanding of our relationship to God. We are certainly not

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84 Grimes, 22.
too sinful to approach the divine, yet we are indeed sinful. One reason that the sense of community enacted in the liturgy is so close to middle-class values is the lack of emphasis on the transcendent holiness of God.\textsuperscript{85} “The awesome holiness of God donates two most fundamental social egalitarianisms, which make Christians cohere in distinctive ways: The first is a sense of communal unworthiness before God; the second is a sense of communal gratitude at being freely and unconditionally raised up and forgiven by God in Christ.”\textsuperscript{86} This communal sense has the ability to foster true mutual compassion for each other. In this, Fr. Kavanagh is correct. There is a real threat to domesticating the Gospel and the power of liturgy when focus is shifted from our sinful nature. The message of God’s unconditional love and forgiveness without explanation as to why forgiveness is needed can turn liturgical worship into an ‘us versus them’ experience. ‘We’ inside the Church are assured of God’s love while ‘they’ outside, or not participating in our community, are not so assured. One can even find evidence of this attitude within the worshiping assembly. Speaking on a personal note, I have never been fond of, nor chosen to participate in, the holding of hands during the Lord’s Prayer. The act of standing and praying in unison does enough to communicate the nature of our corporate

\textsuperscript{85} Cf. “Religion Among the Millennials,” Pew Research Center, February 2010. www.pewforum.org, (accessed on August 10, 2011). This report cites how the religious landscape in America is changing, particularly in the attitudes of those ages 18-29, the millennial generation. This group may have similar beliefs in God and religious issues like morality as older generations, but they are less likely to be religiously affiliated with a specific denomination. It is fair to ask if finding a sense of community is what might attract this group and others without a specific religious affiliation, to formal worship. Again, Fr. Kavanagh believes in the intrinsic importance of the worshiping community, but he criticizes the way certain non-Christian cultural values, e.g. domestication of the Gospel, cordiality, middle-class hospitality, have come to influence the liturgy examined for the study in The Awakening Church. It might also be helpful to suggest that the article was written near the end of his publishing career, and may reflect a certain pessimism about the implementation of the reformed liturgy. This should not discredit his earlier thoughts on the average church-goer as being a theologian or on his ecclesiology “from the pews.”

\textsuperscript{86} Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 88-89. It is important to note that Fr. Kavanagh never focuses on sinfulness or unworthiness without also reminding us that God has freely redeemed us through Jesus Christ. The purpose of the liturgy is to praise and worship God for such a gift.
dependence upon God. Our prayer is not ‘better’ if it is done holding hands, and having it forced upon one by well-intentioned neighbors is uncomfortable. My disdain of this practice does not come from a need for private prayer but the reality that the practice is contrived. It is a sign that is usually empty as I do not know the person next to me in the pew, and there is a great likelihood that the members of my worshiping community will drive aggressively and cut me off when leaving the Church parking lot.\(^8\)

Fr. Kavanagh’s criticism about the goal of liturgy and its need to balance both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of worship is valid. Instead of forced hospitality and contrived community, the enactment of the liturgy can do much to focus on our corporate and individual sinfulness and the wonder of God’s love and forgiveness in spite of it. In a previous chapter, Fr. Kavanagh noted that the Gospel ideal of poverty had shifted from being important to all of the baptized to only being important for those in religious orders. Better that a liturgy remind the assembly of worshipping Christians that God has set a high bar for us, a bar that we rarely reach, and that in spite of our inability God loves us still. We are not saved individually, but as a community. Our goal is the raising up of the community so that all may be saved. This would certainly be a balanced approach to both liturgy and our notion of sin. The understanding of ourselves as redeemed through Jesus Christ implies that we only stand in worship gathered together with Christ, in the Spirit. In assembling, we constitute the Church. In enacting the Eucharist, we have a

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\(^8\) This might suggest the need for smaller, more intimate communities. It seems that the Catholic Church in America is investing more resources to develop communities. (I am thinking specifically of the “See you at Mass” campaign in my home archdiocese.) The question Fr. Kavanagh would bring to these Church communities is one of purpose. Do we gather to get to know one another, similar to many other community events, or do we gather to worship God? One of the criticisms of his theology is that he doesn’t necessarily make the connection between liturgy and the rest of life (see below). I agree that our purpose in liturgy is worship, and that the middle-class values he criticizes can take away this focus; however, his criticism and theology are limited because they don’t recognize the real need the faithful have to live their worship and faith in the community at large.
responsibility to the worshiping community. This responsibility, our corporate worship and salvation, is what we do in liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh referred to it as the Church doing the World. What Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to liturgy lacks is how these Christian truths should be enacted by the faithful in their lives outside of liturgy. If we stand in a community of saved sinners during worship, how should we approach the world in the time not spent in formal worship? How does a Christian approach the world from a practical sense? Does the goal of the liturgy move beyond the church doors?  

Fr. Kavanagh’s view of the liturgy has many implications for the way we worship, and we can extrapolate implications for how such a liturgy may impact the daily lives of Christians. However, Marjorie Procter-Smith points out that Fr. Kavanagh’s theology does not touch on many important parts of contemporary Christian experience. For example, the Roman Catholic focus on social justice and peace is no longer in vogue, but during the time that Fr. Kavanagh was writing, many important teachings from the Church and the USCCB were published. The social encyclicals of the 1980’s and 1990’s took the stand that the Church was a voice for justice and just conduct within the World. Procter-Smith points out, “Kavanagh seemed at points to place a good deal of emphasis on the justice of God and not enough on the need for justice among human beings. He points to our human tendency to do evil to ourselves, but not so much to our tendency to

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88 Cf. Leonardo Boff, Sacraments of Life Life of the Sacraments, (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1987), 78. Speaking of sacramental celebration he notes, “If individuals receive communion, there ought to be elements of communion in the group in which they live…Paul could rightly warn the Corinthians: without conversion a sacrament is a curse, without preparation it is a condemnation. If, on the other hand, people have prepared for a sacrament day by day, then the celebration of it is the vigorous expression of a life illuminated by faith.” Boff presents a view of liturgical celebration that is specifically meant to influence behavior outside of liturgy.

do evil to one another, especially to the innocent.”

Procter-Smith mentions that Fr. Kavanagh’s theology and view of the Church and the World is “cosmic” and this is, of course, the strength of his vision; however, the cosmic is often hard to apply on a practical level.

Geoffrey Wainwright offers a similar criticism of Fr. Kavanagh’s book. He suggests that participation in the liturgy is not the only way to glorify God. Fr. Kavanagh’s lack of focus on the role of mission and morality and their importance in Christian life and worship, “risk(s) putting asunder the dual commandment.” Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical vision certainly addresses the love of God, but does not adequately address love of neighbor. Wainwright’s main concern is that Fr. Kavanagh does not give enough consideration to the role of doctrine in the liturgy. The morality taught by the Church ought to have a real effect on the way Christians live their lives. The mission of the Church is both evangelization and attempting to ease the suffering of the world. Fr. Kavanagh’s lack of engagement with these topics is a hole in his liturgical vision. How is the cosmic dance highlighted in Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgy best brought into practically applying God’s justice to our own attempts at just behavior?

As noted in the previous section and in the introduction to this chapter, the author has allowed Fr. Kavanagh’s vision to influence her approach to liturgy, but it has often

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90 Procter-Smith, 55. Cf. Boff, 85. He would agree that the liturgy and sacraments should include the notion of justice in the world. Speaking of how sacraments can become distorted into sacramentalism, he notes, “People celebrate a sacrament, but without undergoing conversion…The lower and middle sectors of the middle class frequently seem to exhibit a sacramentalist Christianity of this sort. Theirs is a faith for an hour a week…Their concrete lives embody values that are opposed to the faith: for example…the greedy quest for more and more wealth.” Boff makes the same connection that Kavanagh does regarding the influence of middle-class values upon the faithful, but instead of critiquing how this impacts the enactment of liturgy, Boff suggests that the liturgy and sacraments (and a proper conversion) should impact middle-class values. This is a connection that Fr. Kavanagh does not specifically make.

91 Ibid., 54.

been difficult to apply in real life. Most of Fr. Kavanagh’s practical advice about the liturgy can be found in his book *Elements of Rite*. This book spells out such details as where to place a baptismal font within a Church and how to approach the homily.\(^9\) It is concerned with detail, yet it does not address the practical application of the liturgy to life. Perhaps Fr. Kavanagh’s cosmic vision of the relationship of Church and World and their intersection through the liturgy is also a flaw. While it easy to think that a Christian who participates regularly in the corporate worship of the divine God would be formed by such a vision and act accordingly, it is also naïve to assume as much. The reality is that evil occurs, and that evil has been perpetrated by members of the Church. This is the human condition and a real reminder or our sinful nature. That Fr. Kavanagh’s writing does not address these concerns represents a real short-coming in his theology and Procter-Smith’s critique is most valid. It is also important to note that this was not a real concern for Fr. Kavanagh; his cosmic liturgical theology was purposefully built on a larger scale. This is not to say that one cannot search his writings for hints and clues that address the behavior of the faithful outside of liturgy.

Procter-Smith asks how Fr. Kavanagh’s view of liturgy would impact “the relationship between Sunday worship and everyday behavior.”\(^9\) The answer cannot be found in *On Liturgical Theology*. Here he notes that Death is the reality of the World without God. The Church cannot solve the abnormality of the World. “Nor can even Christ’s Church accomplish this by its own efforts at alleviating abnormality’s pernicious effects…The Church can cooperate effectively with those afflicted by systemic abnormality only to the extent that they recognize their affliction and are prepared to be

\(^9\) Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*.

\(^9\) Procter-Smith, 54.
helped in withdrawing themselves from its pathology altogether.”

Certainly, Fr. Kavanagh’s focus in this book is on the evangelizing mission of the Church, but it is unfair to interpret this as a suggestion that the Church should only care about the needs of those who convert. In The Awakening Church, Fr. Kavanagh demonstrates his sensitivity to the need to apply worship to everyday life. He argues that this is difficult and complex subject matter: “[T]he sacrifice of thanksgiving to God in Christ being transmuted into some kind of cultural high tea followed by seminars on social justice, (and) world hunger.” This does not trivialize the import of these topics, but rather shows that a disconnect has been allowed to continue between the purpose of corporate worship and the need for continued religious education. He continues, “Nor can one overlook the fact that the liturgy is not geared to have direct causal results on complex and long-term social problems…other groups do this better in other forums.” He is not trivializing such concerns, but he also does not suggest how the liturgy might influence the groups who are responsible for righting social wrongs.

The reasons as to why he does not address these issues and concerns are difficult to discern. His intellectual background included a passion for moral theology, a passion that would certainly have had elements of practical application. As noted in Chapter one, his education at Trier included working on the preparatory documents addressing communion from the cup. While this does not necessitate that he have a view of the purpose of liturgy in the lives of the faithful, it does point to a focus on the communal elements of liturgical celebration. Perhaps his monastic formation and its focus on

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95 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 167.
96 Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” 93.
97 Ibid., 93-94.
98 See Chapter one, “Biological and Family History.”
asceticism and prayer limited the way he perceived the effects of liturgy.\footnote{Kavanagh, \textit{On Liturgical Theology}, 6. “Christianity’s sustained ascetical stance…tells one something about the way any thoughtful person should address self and world, namely, with caution.”} Or, perhaps, his mature theology that found in \textit{On Liturgical Theology} and in the essay for \textit{The Awakening Church} represents a hardening or dissatisfaction with the way he perceived the current state of the liturgy. His experience working on the liturgical changes of the Second Vatican Council would have influenced the way he thought they should be enacted. Seeing practices that he did not consider compatible with the reform or with the history of Church tradition may have had the effect of limiting the scope of his theology.

A final note on this topic can be found in two of Fr. Kavanagh’s earliest articles. In 1965, Fr. Kavanagh published a series of articles in \textit{Worship} that connected the notion of service to Christian life. Two of these articles, “Sacrament As an Act of Service,” and “The Christian as Servant,” come very close to offering a practical application of liturgical worship to the daily lives of Christian. It is most interesting that this early theme in his writing seemed to be lost in his mature liturgical theology. Fr. Kavanagh’s view of liturgy is no less cosmic in these articles, but it touches more on the actual lives of Christians. Speaking of sacrament he notes, “It is an \textit{experience} by which and in which he (man) is transformed as a person. In the sacramental experience there transpires in me a reduction from a state of being that is potential to a deeper actual state of my being as a person.”\footnote{Aidan Kavanagh, “Sacrament as an Act of Service,” \textit{Worship}, 1965: 92. Cf. George Worgul, \textit{From Magic to Metaphor: A Validation of the Christian Sacraments}, (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1980). Worgul presents a sacramental model of celebration as a means of integrating and balancing sacramental models. Key to this is the process of internalization-externalization. This transformative process is both celebrated in the liturgy and intensified by the liturgy. “The ritual participants, as individuals and community, are turned inward to the source and foundation of the celebration…internalization gives way to externalization…the participants become living acting symbols. In and through the participants, the reality-event (that being celebrated) discloses its depth of meaning. The celebrating community becomes the living vessel of its meaningful treasure.” 217. Worgul’s presentation of the transformative nature of liturgy}
goes beyond one’s involvement in the liturgy. For Fr. Kavanagh, the liturgy is the intersection of Church and World. “Being thus in Christ, the Christian who partakes fully of the Eucharistic celebration is in fact proclaiming…that the presence of Christ with his people is tied…to a right relationship with one’s neighbor.”

We may assume that the neighbor we are to be in relationship with need not be sitting next us in church. This implies that the transformative nature of the liturgy should color our relationship with the World. While it is not practical advice on how to apply the liturgy to life, it at least shows that the liturgy should be so applied.

This notion of the liturgy as the fount of service is also found in the second article. While Fr. Kavanagh criticized the seemingly exclusive focus on the horizontal in the reformed liturgy, he did believe that the horizontal needs to be in balance with the vertical. Speaking of the role of Christ in the vertical, he notes, “[T]here is a real horizontal dimension to the dynamic of his mediating series. The reconciliation he has accomplished is meant to be spread among men, and through them it is meant to redound throughout the whole of the cosmos…It is especially in the outward direction of her service that the Church reveals her continuity with Israel.”

While we may understand these passages as referring to the Church’s evangelical mission and the call to convert the world to Christ, it is important to note that these articles, unlike his mature work, do not limit the notion of service to the World in such a manner. Fr. Kavanagh does not limit mission and these early writings express more openness towards the Church’s involvement in social issues. That said, the criticism of his liturgical theology still and sacrament implies more of a relationship between liturgical and everyday life. This is partly due to the fact that he writes from the perspective of understanding cultural shift and crisis. Liturgical and sacramental celebrations must address the issues of cultural change.

101 Ibid., 96.
stands. Fr. Kavanagh does not tackle the issue of personal evil and the Christian’s role in the World beyond holding it at arm’s distance. He offers little practical advice on how one should allow the liturgy to influence their behavior in the World.

**Lex Orandi…Lex Credendi: A One Way Street?**

Central to Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology is the notion of liturgy as *theologia prima*. As noted throughout this paper, liturgy as primary theology is based on a more exact rendering of *lex orandi…lex credendi*. When written as a ‘tag’ this law appears to be a two way street, meaning that the law of worship/prayer and the law of belief mutually inform one another. Fr. Kavanagh strongly disagrees with this and suggests that the original formulation of this maxim makes it clear that the worship is primary in this relationship. *Lex supplicandi legem statuat credendi* is the original, patristic formulation of this maxim.\(^{103}\) The verb *statuat* has an important role in Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to the law.

The verb *statuat* subordinates the law of belief to the law of worship in just the same way…as our reception of God’s Word is subordinated to the presentation of that Word to us in the act of its being revealed and proclaimed to us. Belief is always consequent upon encounter with the Source of the grace of faith…To reverse the maxim, subordinating the standard of worship to the standard of belief, makes a shambles of the dialectic of revelation.\(^{104}\)

It is clear that Fr. Kavanagh feels very strongly about the foundational nature of worship and its relationship to belief. It is the basis of his liturgical theology.

Fr. Kavanagh is certainly not alone in this assessment, although it may be argued that his stance has the strongest wording. Writing about the importance of liturgical structure, (when compared to meaning), from a historical perspective, Robert Taft noted that, “In the Reformation period structure was bent to serve theology. *Legem credendi*

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\(^{103}\) Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 92.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 91-92.
lex statuat supplicandi was turned around, and theology determined rather than interpreted liturgical text and form." 105 He implies that because the law of belief is established by the law of worship, the role of belief is to act as an interpreter of worship. It can help to determine the meaning, but it should not establish liturgical practice. David Fagerberg makes a similar observation when exploring the liturgy as language. “Lex orandi relates to lex credendi the way speech relates to grammar: first there are people talking, and then there are grammarians who analyze it.” 106 This relationship also informs his presentation of liturgical theology. “It is genuine theology, although it is theologia prima and not theologia secunda, and…it is lex orandi.” 107 By this estimation, liturgical theology is the law of worship/prayer, and both are foundational to belief and all secondary theology.

Finally, it should come as no surprise that Alexander Schmemann agrees in the primacy of lex orandi. For Schmemann, worship is the whole of the Church. It is the Church’s life, and it “embraces, expresses, inspires and defines the whole Church, her whole essential nature, her whole life.” 108 The role of liturgical theology is to connect the whole of liturgical experience as “the ‘rule of prayer’ dwelling within the Church and determining her ‘rule of faith’.” 109 The act of public worship is the Church; it both expresses the Church and fulfills the Church. In this interpretation of worship, it is clear that worship is foundational to all other types of theological discourse. Schmemann’s goal was to establish the legitimacy of liturgical theology within the realm of other

105 Taft, Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding, 152.
106 Fagerberg, Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?, 40.
107 Ibid. 41. As noted in chapter three, Fagerberg was a student of Fr. Kavanagh and was obviously greatly influenced by his approach to liturgical theology.
108 Schmemann, Introduction to Liturgical Theology, 12.
109 Ibid., 14.
theological disciplines, and he does so by not only showing its connection to other theology, but by asserting its task of understanding worship as foundational to other types of theology. As he notes, “Without liturgical theology our understanding of the Church’s faith and doctrine is bound to be incomplete.”\textsuperscript{110} This is a criticism of various types of Scholastic approaches to theology that seemingly relegated liturgical study to a practical study of secondary importance.

Not all liturgical theologians understand \textit{lex orandi...lex credendi} in this manner.\textsuperscript{111} Edward Kilmartin’s opinion that systematic theologians ought to “consider it a matter of the highest priority to show how their subjects can contribute to a better understanding and practice of communal worship,”\textsuperscript{112} has already been noted in this paper. The relationship between theology and worship expressed in this appeal makes it clear that Kilmartin considers the relationship between prayer and belief to be a two way street. He opposes the position that the law of prayer is a law ‘unto itself’. “As a consequence of this one-sided stress on the value of liturgical-practical grounding of theological knowledge, Scripture and the other sources of theology are placed in the background of...theological reflection.”\textsuperscript{113} The opposite of this approach is to suggest that the law of belief grounds the law of prayer. This would also be problematic and extreme. Kilmartin suggests that the maxim be stated thus: “the law of prayer is the law of belief and vice versa.”\textsuperscript{114} Such a rendering shows the interconnectedness of the laws

\textsuperscript{110} Schmemann, \textit{Introduction to Liturgical Theology}, 16.
\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Edward Kilmartin and Geoffrey Wainwright, whose opinion on \textit{lex orandi...lex credendi} will be addressed in subsequent paragraphs.
\textsuperscript{112} Kilmartin, “Theology as Theology of the Liturgy,” 105. See chapter three.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
and allows for the important roles of tradition and theological discourse in shaping liturgical practice.

Fr. Kavanagh would, of course, disagree strongly with the ‘vice versa’ aspect of Kilmartin’s proposal. Allowing room for credendi to found orandi has dangerous consequences that Fr. Kavanagh relates to the problems in liturgical reform. When speaking of the correct meaning of ‘orthodoxy’ he notes that the practice of elevating the role of belief “reveals also a tendency toward utilizing liturgical worship to teach doctrine in an overt, didactic, and rational way.”115 This is one of his main criticisms of the reformed liturgy. Liturgy is more than just reciting doctrine, and a liturgy that does not see its primary goal as worship of the living God is one that speaks to only the intellect and not the whole person. This is not to say that Fr. Kavanagh sees no room for dialogue between the two laws.116 He does attempt to show that the law of belief can influence the law of prayer, but is adamant that it cannot found the law of prayer.117 Creeds and texts emerge from the active worship of the Church and from the change that such worship creates in it.118 When the assembly reflects, even on a preconscious level, about the experience of an act of worship, they participate in theologia prima.119 This is the orandi

117 Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 92.
118 Cf. Power, Sacrament. While Fr. Kavanagh does not take up the issue of language in the vein of postmodern liturgical theology, it is interesting to note that the openness to change in the liturgy, particularly from the enacted liturgy as it changes the assembly is not altogether different from more contemporary considerations. When speaking of sacramental action, and critiquing it from the notion of cultural crisis, Power notes, “A community cannot be locked into its prevailing language code. It has to allow for critical reflection and a readiness to listen to variant points of view on how the rites are tailored and performed,” 243. In a way, this may be similar to the theologia prima that Fr. Kavanagh considers lex orandi.
119 Cf. Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God.” Worgul notes that the role of the theologian is to “articulate and comprehend the mysteries which members of ‘religious’ communities claim they experience and hence believe,” 1. Participation in the mystery leads to critical reflection, a similar notion as Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of theologia prima.
at work and it gives rise to the language of creeds and texts that represent a secondary theology and *lex credendi*. These reflections and the *credendi* to which they give rise certainly influence all subsequent liturgical acts, and therefore, Fr. Kavanagh allows for dialogue between the two.

A final critical voice on this topic is that of Geoffrey Wainwright. He and Fr. Kavanagh engaged in a debate on this subject through a series of articles and book reviews. As explained in chapter three, Fr. Kavanagh allows for four canons to influence and guide liturgy. Wainwright points out that these canons most certainly represent theological reflection and authoritative doctrine. Fr. Kavanagh would argue that influence is not the same as constituting and Wainwright would argue that the canons “possess a relative criteriological autonomy in respect of the liturgy which is indeed their matrix and their very *raison d’être*…Christian worship itself …is ‘always in search’ of an ‘evangelical order’—and in need of apostolic instruction and spiritual discernment.” It can be argued that the autonomy of the canons of scripture, creeds, rubrics and law allows them to have a more foundational relationship with liturgy.

Wainwright criticized Fr. Kavanagh’s distinction between reflection on worship by the assembly and the types of doctrine represented in the canons mentioned above. When speaking of the continuum between prayed theology and reflective theology, he notes that “reflection already affects prayer, while prayer still informs reflection…the liturgical tradition of the church bears the powerful impress of theological reflection and dogmatic decision.” Again, this points to a more foundational aspect of *lex credendi*.

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120 Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 77. He does this to separate himself from those who consider *lex orandi* as a law ‘unto itself’.
Fr. Kavanagh would make a distinction between the reflective theology found in the assembly, *theologia prima*, and the theology produced in academe, *theologia secunda*. The fact is that the liturgy is changed over time by the type of theology that happens in the assembly. Reflective theology done as *theologia prima* does influence the law of prayer, but this influence is seen as organic. Making secondary, academic theology foundational to the actual practice of the Church leads to the detrimental effects noted above.

While it is easy to see the disagreement between these two, it is also hard not to notice that each is unwilling to loosen their definitions. What Wainwright refers to as doctrine and dogma are certainly equal to the canons that Fr. Kavanagh allows to influence the liturgy. Reflective theology as understood by Fr. Kavanagh is that which happens within the liturgy itself, while Wainwright applies it to all of professional theology. Both would agree that worship, particularly worship that goes beyond intellectualism and rational assent, is foundational to the Christian experience, but Wainwright seems unable to allow authority to be a guide rather than a foundational force in liturgical creation. At the same time, Fr. Kavanagh attempts to allow dialogue between the law of prayer and the law of belief, but even with his explanation of the roles of canon, he may not establish the connectedness between the two. This could lead to an assumption that the law of prayer is never in need of correction or guidance, or that the authority of the Church need never step in to fix liturgical abuses. He perhaps does not do enough to guard against the types of liturgical interpretations that he questions in books like *Elements of Rite*.

123 As a Protestant, one may assume that the authority Wainwright speaks of is the authority of the Scripture, rightly interpreted.
The next area of criticism in this section regards Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to confirmation and his theology of initiation. If the law of prayer truly founds the law of belief, confirmation can be considered a sacrament that has become overwhelmed with doctrinal positions on belief. This is particularly true if you agree with Fr. Kavanagh’s hypothesis that confirmation was nothing more than a *missa* between baptism and Eucharist. If so, this liturgical practice has been overshadowed by the doctrinally-based meanings associated with it. “What began as a fairly simple ritual embedded in grander initiation rites has mushroomed into a sacramental declaration of independence for teenagers. Whatever the origins of confirmation, it was never intended to overshadow baptism and eucharist.”

Many scholars agree that the meanings associated with confirmation do not necessarily take its original structure into account.

Paul Turner considers Fr. Kavanagh’s book on the topic to be “the most important book on the topic in the last four hundred years.” This belief is not founded in Turner’s agreement with Fr. Kavanagh’s hypothesis, but rather because Fr. Kavanagh approaches the topic from ritual history. Fr. Kavanagh’s hypothesis may indeed be incorrect, but it offers a starting point for talking about reforming the rite. Turner examines the sources that Fr. Kavanagh used to equate the rite found in the *Apostolic Tradition* with other *missae* in the history of liturgical practice. While agreeing that other *missa* take the shape that Fr. Kavanagh describes, Turner is unconvinced that the prayer and hand-laying by the bishop in *AT* truly represents a dismissal. “A postbaptismal dismissal would be logistically awkward in *AT* 22…Entrance is an unusual moment for a

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dismissal.”¹²⁶ He notes that the other examples of dismissals happen at the end of a liturgical event in preparation for the beginning of another liturgical event.¹²⁷ It is tempting to try and apply the practice of dismissals to the baptismal liturgy, especially to prove that one of the historic sources for the sacrament of confirmation cannot be used as such, “but the thesis remains unprovable in end, despite Kavanagh’s forceful rhetoric.”¹²⁸

Turner’s criticism is valid. Wishing does not make it so. Fr. Kavanagh’s evidence and passion for the topic go far to convince one of his point, but there is no real proof that the rite described in AT is a dismissal as opposed to a separate, episcopal blessing that could be identified as the foundation of confirmation. What is most important about all of Fr. Kavanagh’s writing on confirmation and initiation is the truth that the three sacraments should not be separated from each other, and that their order should be restored. Eucharist, not confirmation, is the sacrament that completes initiation. And all sacraments flow from and lead to the Eucharist, the one sacrament of the sacramental church. “If unconfirmed children receiving eucharist have not completed their initiation into the church, just what is the nature of the common faith we express in the eucharistic banquet?”¹²⁹ This is an important question and certainly like-minded theologians would agree that the three sacraments be brought back into their proper order, if not their historical timing, even if it means that baptism is postponed until the age of reason, or infants are confirmed and communicated.

Perhaps because of his reliance on history, or because of his views on confirmation as a missa, Fr. Kavanagh was not persuaded that the sacraments of initiation

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¹²⁷ Ibid.
¹²⁸ Ibid., 336.
¹²⁹ Ibid.
need to follow rites of passage as defined in Western culture. On one hand, it is easy to agree with Fr. Kavanagh’s suggestion that the sacraments of initiation follow their historic pattern. Eucharist is the seal of initiation and should be reserved for those who have been fully initiated into the Church. On the other hand, it is difficult to break a tradition of treating confirmation as the sacrament of adolescence and young adulthood. Lambert Leijssen presents a postmodern assessment of the situation, and it is clear that it is much more open to the sacraments following the age of cultural rites of passage. “What is at stake here is the challenge of making confirmation a real sacrament of faith and not merely a rite of passage.” While the age of confirmation may vary, in order to make it a real sacrament the community must be actively involved in assisting the confirmed in becoming adult Christians. Leijssen also comments on having witnessed young adults “experience this sacrament with great conviction and admirable honesty.”

His perspective on the sacrament may be different from Fr. Kavanagh’s because of the different practices witnessed by each. In the United States, we have practiced confirmation in adolescence, while many parts of Europe have confirmed children at the age of reason, prior to Eucharist.

130 See Chapter 4, and the discussion on confirmation being the sacrament of exit from the Church. On a personal note, confirmation marked my and most of my friends exit from active worship and Church membership until we were older and had personal conversion experiences that brought us back to the Church.

131 Leijssen, “Confirmation: Status Quaestionis,” 17. He explains that from a theological standpoint, confirmation should be administered at an earlier age, but from a pastoral standpoint, “the catechesis connected with the sacrament receives more emphasis,” and would necessitate a later age.

132 Leijssen, With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit, 53.

133 Ibid.

134 Leijssen, With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit, 53.

135 Leijssen, “Confirmation: Status Quaestionis,” 18-20. He notes that the broad range of age is 7-12, while practice in Belgium has been kept at the age of twelve.
One final note from the postmodern assessment of confirmation is that Leijssen also believes that confirmation represents the second step in the rite of initiation. What he does not present is how the age of confirmation, and its connection to adulthood, should influence the timing of First Communion. As noted above, the postmodern view of these sacraments is much more open to relating them, not exclusively, to rites of passage found in the larger culture. This is one reason why Leijssen suggests, “In the future it is possible that confirmation will more likely be celebrated at the time of young adulthood.” If this is the age that makes most sense from a cultural perspective, would the final step in initiation, Eucharist, also be postponed until this time? This is a question the Leijssen does not address, and while it may not be a question of import in the postmodern assessment of liturgy and sacraments, it is a question that is important to our understanding of how we become initiated into the Church.

Implications: Relevance of Aidan Kavanagh’s Theology in Light of Current Revisions

A note from a Festschrift written in his honor refers to Fr. Kavanagh as, “one of the most influential liturgists of the post-conciliar period.” Elements of Rite is a book that has been used in seminaries as a primer for liturgical celebration. His writings produced debate and dissent, and filled many of his students with a passion to understand the liturgy as he understood it. Some current liturgical practices that evolved after the reformed liturgy was introduced can be traced in part to his influence. Longer services, better homilies, public baptisms of infants, some elements of liturgical excess regarding

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137 Leijssen, With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit, 53.
138 Baldovin, cover statement, in Rule of Prayer, Rule of Faith: Essays in Honor of Aidan Kavanagh, OSB.
139 Fagerberg, 2. He is completely committed to Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology.
the symbols of liturgy, are consistent with his suggestions for how the liturgy should be enacted. We may not be able to trace them directly to his writing, but certainly his approach to liturgy can be seen as influencing the way liturgists work to evolve ritual worship. For this reason, Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology, his critiques and warnings as well as his overall vision, still have relevance in the way we gather together in worship. The Catholic Church in the United States will soon be engaged in another evolution of liturgy as the third edition of the Roman Missal takes effect in November of 2011. While the new Missal will make some additions to the liturgy of other countries, the United States will face the most changes to the language of its mass. The reasons for this will be discussed below. An attempt will be made to apply Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical vision as a commentary and critique on these proposed changes.

The application of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology will be limited to the new language brought to liturgy. The new language will have the most impact on the daily and weekly worship lives of the Christian assembly in the United States. To begin this critique, it is necessary to review some of Fr. Kavanagh’s earlier comments on the reformed liturgy and on the nature of liturgy and ritual in general. In 1969, Fr. Kavanagh published an article in *Worship* that offered a review of the reformed Eucharistic prayers. At the time, he noted that the prayers were ‘hybrids’ of various liturgical traditions. He does not provide direct criticism of this but notes, “it does seem relevant to ask why so high a degree of syncretism was felt necessary to render the Eucharistic prayer more adequate to present needs. This, in turn, raises once again the question of the basic purpose of such a prayer in the first place.”

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140 Kavanagh, “Thoughts on the New Eucharistic Prayers,” 2-12.
141 Ibid., 4.
because of the nature of the reforms themselves. This is an area that Fr. Kavanagh does criticize. When speaking about assumptions that are detrimental to liturgy, he explains, “It is the assumption that changes in worship-forms can be effectively accomplished by committees.”\textsuperscript{142} This is one of Fr. Kavanagh’s most stringent criticisms of the reformed liturgy. By their nature, committees must run on the notion of compromise and generalization. Legitimate questions and concerns must be pruned in order to move the committee forward.

This touches on another aspect important to Fr. Kavanagh: the role and development of ritual. Ever the historian, Fr. Kavanagh warned that the liturgies reformed by the Second Vatican Council cannot assume that “one can move neatly from a former static system of worship…to a new static system of worship that will somehow be adequate to contemporary needs and possibilities.”\textsuperscript{143} The point he is making is that ritual, of which liturgy is one type, is not static. By its nature, ritual evolves over time as it moves and shifts to changes in culture. This is not to say that liturgy is subject to the whim of culture. As noted in chapter two, the liturgy transforms cultures rather than becomes transformed by them.\textsuperscript{144} But liturgy does evolve in response to the needs of culture. The liturgy of Vatican II was a reform of an uncharacteristically static liturgy that had evolved in response to the pressures of the Reformation.\textsuperscript{145} “From the sixteenth century to our own day, liturgical evolution was forced into the area of popular ‘extra-liturgical’ and para-liturgical devotions…Thus…the western church got used to a rigid official liturgy on the one hand, and to a largely undiscriminating body of quasi-liturgical

\textsuperscript{142} Kavanagh, “Liturgical Needs for Today and Tomorrow,” 491.
\textsuperscript{143} Kavanagh, “How Rite Develops: Some Laws Intrinsic to Liturgical Evolution,” 336-337.
\textsuperscript{144} See chapter two, 53.
\textsuperscript{145} Kavanagh, “How Rite Develops,” 345.
proliferation on the other.”146 His message to the Church is that we must continue to be open to changes and evolution in the liturgy. A healthy liturgy grows and changes to assist the culture in continued access to God’s presence and gift of forgiveness.

The role of authority, or committees for that matter, is to moderate liturgical evolution. “[R]eligious worship evolves authentically only from below, that is to say, the genesis point of its life and growth lies in the first instance where the community, aware of what it is, is in contact with the epoch in which it lives.”147 Some of the problems with reception of the reformed liturgy in the United States have to do with the ‘top-down’ perception of the changes. Other problems are even deeper. Fr. Kavanagh explains that contemporary liturgy faces the problem of a culture that seems to focus on the irrelevant; such a culture is not prepared to celebrate the liturgy. “Thus the new eucharistic canons are presented by ecclesiastical officials with such maximal assurances about their salutary effects that one forgets to inquire whether most congregations have sufficient motive to celebrate the eucharist in the first place.”148 He perceived that the changes made did not adequately reflect the state of contemporary culture, in part because they did not evolve ‘naturally’ and also because the American Church did not have an adequate perception of the state of culture. Much of this is because of the static nature of the liturgy that went before the Second Vatican Council.

How can this perspective be brought to bear on the new changes to the language of the liturgy? It would be easy to note that these changes are again from the top-down. The call to revise the Roman Missal came from Pope John Paul II in 2000, and some of the largest changes are a response to real growth and change in the Church. New prayers

147 Ibid., 343.
for recently canonized saints, additional Masses for special needs and occasions and updated rubrics speak to not only the changing Church but also a changing culture. The USCCB website offers the following assurances about the new mass: “The entire Church in the United States has been blessed with this opportunity to deepen its understanding of the Sacred Liturgy, and to appreciate its meaning and importance in our lives.” This is obviously the goal of all liturgy, and certainly changes do allow people think more carefully about what they say in liturgy. Language can become rote and lose its meaning.

An article linked to the USCCB website offers one reason for the new translation. Quoting Msgr. Kevin Irwin from Catholic University, “[T]he Committee charged with the English translation…issued the post-Vatican II translations very quickly…They realized, after a few years’ use of the Missal, that some translations should have been more accurate.” The website also notes that one of changes, the response, “and with your spirit” was already accurately translated into the other languages in the original revision. “English is the only major language of the Roman Rite which did not translate the word spiritu.” This same note explains that the response helps to highlight the role of the ordained minister, as it is specifically addressing “the gift of the spirit he received at ordination.” It is a response that is also a prayer designed to assist the priest in the use of his charismatic gifts. There is perhaps an interesting opportunity for catechesis in this; one that will need to be explained. Contemporary Catholics have often seen

152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
priests’ roles as being administrators. This is a reminder of special charism of the ordained.

Another interesting new translation is the change from ‘for all’ to ‘for many’ in the Eucharistic Prayer. This is one of the translations that caused a great deal of debate during the whole translation project. For many, this translation implies that Jesus did not die for everyone; an implication that is not theologically sound. Again, the USCCB website addresses this question and states, “It is the dogmatic teaching of the Church that Christ died on the Cross for all men and women.”\(^{154}\) The answer also explains that salvation is not brought about without the active and willing participation of each person. Those who accept Christ’s gift in faith are those counted among the ‘many’.\(^{155}\) It is interesting to note that other languages will be facing the same issue with changing ‘for all’ to ‘for many’, meaning that the new language is more than just trying to be faithful to the Latin text. It implies that the Church is trying to clarify teaching on the subject of salvation. Paul Turner points out, “Literally, historically, and biblically, that will be a sound translation, but it will be hard evidence to people who feel that self-contented authorities want to push others aside.”\(^{156}\) Does this mean that the teaching from Vatican II was incomplete? Fr. Kavanagh was obviously a supporter of \textit{lex orandi, lex credendi}, and in this case how we pray seems to really influence what we believe. An entire generation of Catholics has heard that the Lamb’s blood was shed for all, so that sins may be forgiven. While the explanation of why ‘for many’ is theologically sound, assisting Catholics in understanding this level of subtlety will be very difficult.

\(^{154}\) Roman Missal – FAQs, \url{http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/translating_six_questions.shtml}. (accessed on May 27, 2011).
\(^{155}\) Ibid.
Fr. Kavanagh would certainly applaud changes that represent correct translations and improved historical understanding of the liturgy; however, the method of these changes represents the work of committees and ‘top-down’ change to the liturgy. Historically changes have happened in a more organic manner, with authority approving liturgical changes spawned by growing cultural awareness and need. But the Catholic Church has never been a democracy. “The Catholic Church doesn’t work that way. Never has. We have a hierarchy.” Fr. Kavanagh did not think that the Catholic Church should be operated in a democratic manner, but he did feel that the hierarchy had the role to accept and modify liturgical changes that were happening in the Church. This is different than imposing a change if no need for change has been expressed by the Church at-large.

Much of the criticism of the new translation rests in the committee process and how final changes were made without final approval from the US Bishops. As noted above, the committee process is an imperfect tool for liturgical change. Fr. Kavanagh would have criticized this aspect of the updated liturgy. This being said, he would have supported the changes, the same as he supported the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. Support does not mean that one cannot criticize and comment on weaknesses; it does mean that one is faithful to the authority of the Church and works to make problems known to better the liturgy. Fr. Kavanagh may have taken the same approach as Paul Turner does. Turner cites many problems with the new translations for the US, particularly the fact that no other Christian churches were invited to the process and the lack of consideration for inclusive language. Despite his concerns, he supports

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the changes and hopes that appropriate introduction and catechesis will be done to highlight the positives of the changes. “All told, I think there are some beautiful improvements in the missal, and overall we will be getting a better book than the one we have.” This echoes Fr. Kavanagh’s own approach to the reformed liturgy.

In his closing thoughts after critiquing the new Eucharistic Prayers, Fr. Kavanagh declared, “Nevertheless, I expect that the new prayers will be generally well received, as it is appropriate that it should be so. They constitute a real, if modest, step forward so long as they do not come to be regarded as the last word or harbingers of the parousia.” He wanted to reinforce the point that liturgy should not remain static; the Church must be open to evolution in the liturgy even that which comes to it via committee. This emphasizes the point he made that we cannot move from one static liturgy, that of Trent, to another static liturgy. Change is important and necessary. Fr. Kavanagh’s passionate study and explanation of the liturgy should continue to be of influence in the way the Church approaches its worship of God. Appropriate catechesis on the new liturgical translations, a refocusing of what the assembly is called to do in communal worship and a renewed sense of the importance of the liturgy are all potential benefits of the revised liturgy of the Church. They are also part of Fr. Kavanagh’s vision for the Church. Changes to the liturgy offer the opportunity for emphasizing the need of continual conversion, and that is an aspect of change that Fr. Kavanagh would surely support.

Contemporary Issues in Liturgical Theology

Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology did not address the concerns of postmodern theology. Issues of metaphysics and ontology were never directly used in his treatment

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of the liturgy. For all of the criticism noted above about how to apply his thinking to liturgy, his ‘cosmic’ approach to liturgy was influenced specifically by its historical enactment in the life of the Church and can be considered as coming from a practical focus. One reason for this might be the timing of his scholarship. His mature theology was written in the late 1980’s. As represented by the authors in this section, the postmodern turn in liturgical theology was just beginning at this time. Subsequent paragraphs will situate his liturgy within certain philosophical/theological approaches, but it is clear that he did not consider the issues of postmodernity as central to enacting the liturgy. Despite this, the postmodern approach to liturgy can be helpful in providing both a critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology and means to place Fr. Kavanagh’s theology in its appropriate context. There is a place for conversation between Fr. Kavanagh and postmodern liturgical theology.

A final critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology will take into account two contemporary issues about which he is largely silent. The issues of ecumenism and the role of cultural differences are contemporary issues that postmodern theologians attempt to address. These are also issues that were being considered and written on during Fr. Kavanagh’s time. His lack of engagement with these issues, and how liturgy impacts them or vice versa, appears to be a lacuna in his theological thought.

Before attempting a critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology in light of postmodernity, it is necessary to provide more background into the way postmodernity has begun to influence theology. Some primary topics of concern in postmodern theology will be explained as will some of the influences that have led to the cultural shift which gives rise

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161 With the exception of George Worgul’s *From Magic to Metaphor*, the works representing postmodern thought on liturgy were all published in the 1990’s and early 2000’s.
162 This was briefly noted in the introductory section of this chapter, and throughout in certain comparisons.
to postmodern thought. Approaches to the liturgy in this contemporary context use concepts with which Fr. Kavanagh was familiar. The concepts of icon and idol, liturgy and language, and symbol and sacrament are found throughout Fr. Kavanagh’s own theology. However, the postmodern approach to these concepts and their use in liturgical theology goes beyond Fr. Kavanagh’s thought. In addition to the concepts mentioned above, this introductory section will attempt to define the postmodern approach to metaphysics, being, gift, and God’s presence and absence particularly in relation to the enactment of liturgy.

The concepts being addressed in this section are necessarily interrelated, but for the sake of understanding, we will address the main postmodern approach to them independently. Any discussion of liturgy must include the concepts of symbol and sacrament. As noted in Chapter two, both Fr. Kavanagh and Alexander Schmemann lament the loss of symbolic understanding in contemporary society.\(^\text{163}\) Both theologians premise much of their theology on the role of the symbolic in liturgy. The postmodern approach to the symbolic largely does the same, and this is an area of similarity between Fr. Kavanagh’s theology and postmodernity. While both theologies embrace the symbolic, it seems that the postmodern approach spends less time worrying about whether contemporary society understands symbol and instead offers alternatives to understand the symbolic, or to move beyond it.

\(^{163}\) See page 44. Fr. Kavanagh expresses that symbols have the ability to hold multiple levels of meaning and Schmemann bemoans the contemporary attitude that the symbol is merely representative. That is, it is on par with an illustration rather than conveying ever deeper levels of reality.
While highlighting the interpersonal-encounter approach to liturgy, George Worgul explains that this sacramental model understands the symbol as “signifier, the signified is really present without absolute identification.” This is in line with Schmemann when he explains “[I]n the symbol everything manifests the spiritual reality, but not everything pertaining to the spiritual reality appears embodied in the symbol. The symbol is always partial, always imperfect.” Worgul also notes that the symbol is not of our making. “Symbols are not made by humankind. They are discovered in reality.”

Even with this understanding of the incompleteness of the symbol, and the insistence that we do not produce it, the postmodern approach asserts that symbols run the risk of “being confused with who/what they symbolize.” This potentially leads to idolatry, a concept that will be addressed below. Nonetheless, liturgy and sacraments, even in the postmodern context, must deal with symbol. One way this can be done is by enriching the concept of symbol through recourse to the icon. Another way is to analyze and broaden our understanding of symbol.

Louis-Marie Chauvet chooses the second approach, and while his explanation of the symbolic includes elements of icon, he still refers to it as symbol. Part of the

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164 This approach is associated with the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner, and it will be argued that this type of approach to sacraments is somewhat representative of Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to liturgical theology.
166 Schmemann, The Eucharist, 39.
167 Worgul, From Magic to Metaphor, 41.
169 Cf., Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” and Leijssen, With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit. The concept of icon will be explored in greater detail below.
170 As a point of comparison, Fr. Kavanagh, Schmemann and Grimes were each concerned with the loss of understanding of the symbolic that they found in contemporary society. The postmodern theologians under consideration in this section do not make the same criticism. They seem to start from the premise that human beings innately understand symbol because of the role of the symbolic in human language, which is constitutive of humans themselves and communication in community. Speaking of symbol, sign and language, Chauvet notes, “But its primary function lies elsewhere, in its unique capacity to place things at a distance by naming them, and thus representing them, thereby giving them speech. The result…is that the
postmodern critique of the modern is its over-rationalistic approach and its preference of the sign over the symbolic.\textsuperscript{171} This underscores the point made by Schmemann that symbols have come to be seen as \textit{merely} representations.\textsuperscript{172} What makes the postmodern assessment of symbol different from Fr. Kavanagh and Schmemann is the confidence that contemporary society has begun to rediscover the need for symbol.\textsuperscript{173}

The rediscovery of symbol in our day is fortunate in view of the dangerous excesses...of the ‘totalitarianism’ of critical reason, notably in its variant, ideological scientism, which claims it controls everything. Human beings also need to sing. But this being said, scientific discourse and critical reason retain all their rights; without them, the fixation on symbols risks producing other deviations, emotionalistic or esoteric-mystical, that are no less dangerous, as current events sometimes demonstrate.\textsuperscript{174}

The postmodern approach to symbol is one that recognizes its importance but does not inflate its purpose or confuse it for that which it symbolizes. Instead of communicating only the presence and sameness of the order to which it points, this approach to the symbol asserts that it also points to absence and difference.

Speaking of the action of symbolization in the sacraments, Chauvet explains, “Because only differences can be symbolized, such a symbolization is possible only inasmuch as Christ and the church are rigorously \textit{differentiated}: Christ is irreducible to a simple code word for the church.”\textsuperscript{175} As symbols, sacraments point to the absence of Christ. Chauvet uses the example of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and how they did not know they were speaking with Christ until he broke the bread and disappeared.

\textsuperscript{171} Chauvet, 74. He explains that the sign, “leads to something other than itself,” whereas the symbol introduces “us to an order of which itself is a part.”
\textsuperscript{172} See Chapter 2 and footnote 162 above.
\textsuperscript{173} This may not be in regards to the liturgy, but because the postmodern critique includes a distrust of the over-rationalism of the modern there seems to be a sense that the symbolic, usually best understood through artistic mediums, is just as important as the rational, sign-based language of science. Chauvet, 83.
\textsuperscript{174} Chauvet, 83.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 85.
from their sight. The symbol in this sense communicates much more and cannot be mistaken for that which it symbolizes. This frees it from the trap of becoming an idol.

Before exploring the postmodern approach to idol and icon, it is necessary to briefly explain more of the postmodern critique of the modern. In promoting a sacramental model that moves beyond some of the traps mentioned above, Worgul explains the milieu of postmodernity: “We are suspicious of the imperialism of Master-narratives… We prefer to appreciate the contextual character of narrative and respect… their manifold and plural perspectives.” In essence, the postmodern respects that meaning is not founded on a universal system; it is open and contextualized to society. The imperialism to which he refers has much to do with modernity’s focus on the rational. “Modernity’s confidence in rationality is thought to be at the root of much evil, so that we are now faced with the collapse of a familiar and excessively optimistic world, which made man and human progress the center of all reality.” This disillusionment is felt not only in the community, in the fact that supposed foundations have not been able to create stable societies, but also in our experience of expressing God. We cannot speak assuredly of God and God’s presence (the goal of rationality) without understanding that our speaking does not make it so; our rationality has no claims on God’s presence.

176 Chauvet, 85.
177 Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” 12. (bolding his)
178 Power, 12. The need to not speak as confidently of God’s presence comes in part from our human experience of God’s absence that comes to us in the reality of human suffering. “The need for a fresh theological and ecclesial approach to revelation and to worship is inspired by a sense of modernity’s social failure and of the Church’s hesitancy, or even inability, to speak to a suffering humanity. What the post[-]modern critique contends is that the response to failure and its attendant suffering cannot be given through any grand scheme of things or through any symbol system that pretends to incorporate human tragedy into its perception of the whole.” Power, 31. There is no metaphysical answer to suffering. The divine response to suffering is not presumed, but if it comes, it comes on the small, human scale.
179 Power, 13.
Modernity’s dissatisfaction with faith in the rational lies in rationality’s assumption of a metaphysical foundation or ontological explanation for the world and our expression of it. To this end, postmodern liturgical theologians take their cue from postmodern philosophy and its attempt to move beyond metaphysics and ontology. While theologians may use this philosophy to undergird their approach to liturgy and sacraments, most do not attempt to completely liberate their thought from the metaphysical or the ontological. “Even though postmodernity rejects various forms of metaphysical-ontological thought, such as causality…and the spiritual as the representation of a physical model, it does not follow it that denies a metaphysical origin of the world.”¹⁸⁰ The project of postmodern theology is to explain God’s presence in a manner that protects it from our mechanistic assumptions that we somehow control God’s presence. This is why the postmodern concerns itself with opposites. “In today’s postmodern thought world, when we search for possible ways of speaking about God’s presence, we see that it will always be in terms of absent/present…I transcendent/immanent, invisible/visible…God cannot be experienced directly, but God probably can be experienced as ‘present absence’.”¹⁸¹ In postmodern thought the experience of God comes in the realm of our own human experiences.

¹⁸⁰ Leijssen, *With the Silent Glimmer*, 27. He is explaining the work of Georges De Schrijver, and concludes that postmodernity should be considered postmetaphysical rather than antimetaphysical.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 24. There is a sense of the apophatic in this approach. I find it particularly important that Leijssen and the other theologians considered in this section deal with God’s proximity and presence, even when held in tension with the opposites of distance and absence. Jean-Luc Marion, and his work *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), attempts to speak of the experience of God (not God’s presence or of God’s actuality) without the violence of making God equal to Being (and therefore opening God up to our idolatrous tendencies of control). It is the author’s opinion that he presents a God who is too distant. It is important that contemporary theology deals with the distant God, not only in the reality of our own suffering, but in attempting to not equate our thoughts of God with Godself. Liturgical theology must also deal with the proximity of God; the God who gratuitously draws close and becomes present in the liturgy. Contemporary liturgical theology addresses this through the icon without attempting to explain how God is made present. Again, it is the author’s interpretation that philosophers such as Marion highlight God’s distance without giving equal attention to God’s
One approach to understanding liturgy in a postmodern context is to consider it as originating from the human person. “The point of departure is no longer God, who remains in the center and approaches humanity. The sacramental liturgy is convened from the perspective of the individual who steps before God in the community of faith.”\textsuperscript{182} This is different from Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective that liturgy is a response to God. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology supports the notion that ritual is a human response and enacted by humans, but that it originates in God.\textsuperscript{183} This is problematic for postmodern theologians because it relies too heavily on ontology and metaphysics. Power provides an example of the role of human beings in sacramental/liturgical celebration. “It is human life which is described through the language of being, not the divine agape which appears and is given through sacrament to augment our being. In a very particular way, ritual awakens participants to the reality of human being in its facticity.”\textsuperscript{184} This approach to ritual highlights the communal nature of the liturgy as originating from the human while at the same time the human community recognizes God’s grace coming to them through the sacrament. As Worgul notes, “God is never known in his ousia (essence) but only in his energe (manifestation or trace).”\textsuperscript{185} This is part of the celebrational model of liturgy and sacraments, and it highlights God’s presence in the celebration without needing to explain how it is caused.

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\textsuperscript{182} Leijssen, \textit{With the Silent Glimmer}, 16.
\textsuperscript{183} See Chapter three. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is a theology of presence. He takes his cue from Schmemann on this, “theology is above all explanation, ‘the search for words appropriate to the nature of God’, i.e. for a system of concepts corresponding as much as possible to the faith and experience of the Church.” Schmemann, \textit{Introduction to Liturgical Theology}, 14. The search for the nature of God and God’s presence are kept out of the postmodern approach to liturgy.
\textsuperscript{184} Power, 290.
\textsuperscript{185} Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” 15.
Worgul provides another example of the celebrational model which will provide a bridge to uncovering the postmodern concepts of idol and icon and finally gift. Worgul notes, “The liturgical/sacramental celebrations of the church are iconic. Each sacrament is in its own way a rite of passage...there is change and alteration with differing degrees of continuity or discontinuity. When we lay aside any misconceptions that we are the initiators of these changes, we rightfully come to understand they are God’s iconic gifts.”

While God initiates the changes, the ritual celebrations are a human endeavor. Fr. Kavanagh’s theology would not disagree with this, but the fact that the postmodern approach resists ‘pinning down’ God as the center and creator of liturgy would be foreign to him. What Worgul suggests is that God breaks through the liturgical/sacramental celebrations and meets us where we are, but we cannot control the in-breaking of God’s presence through the celebration itself. As an icon, the celebration moves beyond presence and present, as in time, and moves into the eschatological promise of God’s kingdom.

In postmodern thought, the icon becomes an answer to the human tendency to attempt to control God and God’s grace that was an unintended consequence of Scholastic theology’s answer to questions about the efficacy of sacraments. The metaphysical model assured us that the sacraments caused what they signified. “No one

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186 Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” 16. As a point of comparison, Fr. Kavanagh might consider the changes Worgul notes to be the passing of theologia prima, the change that takes place in the liturgical assembly.

187 I do not think Fr. Kavanagh would ever suggest that the liturgy controls God’s presence. He left the action of liturgy, the action of God’s presence to Godself. The postmodern critique of this approach to liturgy is that it still relied on a type of causality that assumed God as equal to Being, thus risking the otherness of God and not focusing on God’s absence. Our conceptualization of God was too close to our conceptualization of ourselves. Fr. Kavanagh did not necessarily assume that God’s presence was guaranteed at every liturgical celebration, but he didn’t question if it was. It is assumed and unspoken. God as foundation of Christian liturgy is found in liturgy. This is why the postmodern critique can ask if Fr. Kavanagh’s theology adequately takes the contemporary experience of God’s absence into consideration.

imagined the danger of this presumably innocent model. Sadly, it gave rise to a distorted understanding of the sacraments as automatic dispensers of grace—‘grace machines’.\textsuperscript{189} The mechanistic view of sacramental efficacy is one of the meta-narratives with which postmodernity takes exception. The icon does not presume to define or equate God with a symbol of our own understanding. “Icons are drenched with meaning. This saturation empowers the icon to function as a type of window. Through the icon, God gazes upon us and comes to us. This action of divine love is purely gratuitous and totally God’s free initiative.”\textsuperscript{190} While we have been assured that Christ will be in our midst whenever we are gathered together in His name, we cannot control the mode of God’s presence in our community or how God chooses to time God’s presence and absence. Because of its gratuitous nature, and the belief that God is active in human lives, the icon doesn’t question what causes God’s presence, but implores us to open ourselves to the God who is always approaching us through the icon. Essentially, the action of accepting God’s love falls back upon us. We must open ourselves to the gift of God’s presence.

As mentioned throughout this section, the language of symbol when referring to God’s presence (and even potentially the language of icon) runs the risk of becoming an idol. “Idolatry worships false gods whom we can ‘possess’, control and manipulate.”\textsuperscript{191} The limit of the symbolic is that it focuses on presence, and the symbol runs the risk of becoming equated with the thing symbolized. Appropriating the thought of Jean-Luc Marion, Power notes, “Icon is thus used to counter images of representation, physical, metaphysical, and epistemological. All of these seem to draw the power of divine being into themselves, draw attention to themselves…and place God within the confines…of

\textsuperscript{189} Leijssen, \textit{With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit}, 9.  
\textsuperscript{190} Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” 15.  
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
We then make of that thing an object. The icon does not deal with making God present, but becomes the vehicle through which we encounter the gaze of the loving God. “[I]n approaching a sign as icon the beholder does so in the sentiment of being gazed upon rather than gazing.” Leijssen refers to this as the “inversion of our point of view.” We are not the controlling gaze. We do not view an image as representational of God. Rather, we find ourselves being gazed at by God through the icon.

The icon also runs the risk of becoming an idol when we lose sight of the gaze coming through the icon, and instead focus on the meaning, or perhaps even the emotions the icon elicits within us. When we do this, we no longer recognize that God is “wholly Other, different from ourselves.” As mentioned above, the postmodern approach to theology is one that seeks to protect the divine from our control. Hence, God is moved outside of the realm of Being. This is, of course, a reaction to the theology of the Scholastics which was distilled to explaining God’s grace in sacraments through mechanistic causes. The liturgy and sacraments are icons not because of what we do, what the priest says or the specific ritual followed. Liturgy and sacraments are icons because of our openness to the free gift that is given to us by God. Liturgy is performative; the actions of liturgy allow us to know that God gazes at us through the ritual, but the ritual and action does not create God’s presence in the act. The icon allows us to recognize God’s love as pure gift, given freely, with no expectation of return, but a love that we cannot possess or control.

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192 Power, 284. (italics his)
193 Ibid.
194 Leijssen, With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit, 29.
195 Ibid.
196 See above.
197 Power, 284.
As mentioned throughout the above section on postmodern theology, Fr. Kavanagh would not necessarily disagree with the way liturgy, sacraments and presence are approached in this perspective. In this chapter and previous ones, Fr. Kavanagh made it clear that he was no friend of the way Scholastic theology changed the liturgy of the Church. He did not agree with the mechanistic approach to sacraments and grace. The difference between his theology and that of postmodernity can be found in his sources. As mentioned previously, his theology fits more closely to that of the interpersonal-encounter model. He is obviously also influenced by a historical model that sought inspiration from the early Church. His theology can be briefly compared to that of postmodernity by showing his connection to the above models and how this influenced his opinion on the rites of initiation as rites of passage. As noted above, his later, more mature theology, seemed to become calcified because of a pessimistic view he brought to the way liturgy was being enacted. This is a point of contrast with the postmodern. For all of the critique postmodernity levels on the modern, postmodern theology has a much more optimistic and celebratory outlook as to how we encounter God in the liturgy.

The interpersonal-encounter model of sacraments was itself a response to the problems of Scholastic theology and the over-confidence in rationality. This model also attempted to answer the questions of causality, but it approached the question through the concept of symbol. A brief explanation of the premise of symbolic causation has been

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198 One example referenced in this chapter is the link between Scholasticism and the text.
199 The focus on the words of institution is partly to blame for the over-clericalization of the liturgy and the passivity on the part of the laity. This, in turn, led to other liturgical accretions such as the private mass, various piety movements that offered the laity an active worship life and stagnation in organic liturgical evolution. Fr. Kavanagh’s basic theology of the Church doing the World, requires the communal, active participation of the entire Church assembled.
mentioned above, but it is important to note that this model took its cue from human relationships. “[T]hese writers enlarged the understanding of sign so that it could be better appreciated as an act of self-communication, both divine and human, and an encounter with grace.”

This is a theology of presence; God’s presence in the world does not only come from sacraments, but from its very creation and redemption in Jesus Christ. “In this manner the Christian sacraments become the form of appearance, the visible holiness of humans in the world. They are grace in explicitly visible form. Real life is celebrated in the liturgical act.” In many ways, this is similar to Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of liturgy as Church doing the World. The liturgy does the World in the way it was meant to be done; in praise, worship and thanksgiving of the Creating and Redeeming God.

Like the interpersonal-encounter model, Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is one of presence. He may not spend as much time comparing human relationships to the divine relationship of the Triune God, but he clearly describes liturgy as a corporate act. The corporate act of worship relies heavily on the symbolic. In this model, human understanding of self and other is “rendered possible through symbol. The symbol is given as a sign of God’s presence, but it is also given as means whereby the human person and the human community can become self-present, both as being loved by God and being in love with God.” Fr. Kavanagh’s prime example of the symbol that links together the Church and the World are the urban liturgies of the early Church. Because

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201 Power, 56.
203 See Chapter two, 43.
204 Power, 57.
205 See Chapter two.
of their scale, (city-wide and day-long) and their processional nature, these liturgies were powerful symbols of God’s presence. As symbols, they appealed to all of the human senses. They also provided the participants an active symbol of the community which praises God. These liturgies did not ‘conjure up’ God’s presence, but through symbol attuned the worshipping, moving, singing assembly to the presence that was awaiting them in the redeemed world.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Fr. Kavanagh’s use and appreciation of icons and his comparison between icon and symbol are also points of comparison between his theology and that of postmodernity. An icon, more than a symbol, is that which makes God present. In Chapter two, Fr. Kavanagh’s understanding of the inverse perspective of the icon is explained, ―His (the icon painter’s) point of departure in perspective is not found in the illusory depth of the image which attempts to reproduce visible space, but before the image, in the spectator himself.‖ While this is not antithetical to the postmodern use of icon, this approach does point to Fr. Kavanagh’s theology as being from the interpersonal-encounter model. In postmodern theology, the perspective of the icon would be the gaze of the loving God coming through the icon. Human beings would find themselves being gazed at. In Fr. Kavanagh’s use of perspective, the human being is primary in the perspective of the icon. This could, of course, lead one to create an idol of the icon. That said, Fr. Kavanagh also adds the caveat the human perspective is inverted by the Gospel. The icon goes beyond our

\[^{206}\text{Kavanagh, On Liturgical Theology, 41. See Chapter two, 48.}\]
\[^{207}\text{Ibid.}\]
natural, human meanings by inverting them according the meaning of God’s perspective.\(^{208}\)

Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is also influenced by a historical approach to liturgy and sacraments. While this is not completely separate from the interpersonal-encounter model,\(^{209}\) it may be fair to say that the Fr. Kavanagh was influenced by the interpersonal-encounter model, but consciously and actively chose to base his theology on the historical approach to liturgy. Power explains that the interpersonal-encounter model is still important. “It grounds the sacramental in humanity’s being in the world…it shows how celebration of sacrament is both a divine presence through the memorial of Christ and a divine openness and promise of what is to come.”\(^{210}\) Fr. Kavanagh’s theology of a lived, enacted worship is centered in such presence. The historical lens through which he viewed the liturgy is not opposed to the postmodern approach to liturgy, but Fr. Kavanagh’s appreciation of the historical liturgy might have led him to try and reappropriate some of those elements in too literal a fashion. Speaking of problems with liturgical reform, Power notes, “This is not overcome by a return to the premodern, but by moving into a new cultural and religious phase.”\(^{211}\) It is justifiable to say that Fr.

\(^{208}\) The inverted Gospel perspective as understood by Fr. Kavanagh is usually exemplified by the seemingly paradoxical nature of revelation: the first shall be last; victory over death is won through the humiliation of the cross, etc. These examples point to how God’s nature, God’s justice, is very different from our own. Of course, because Fr. Kavanagh is seeking to make tentative explanations about the nature of God, his thinking is not in line with the concerns of postmodernity. He is still operating from a perspective that God is equal to Being.

\(^{209}\) See Worgul, “Sacraments: Iconic Interruptions of the Loving God,” 9. Worgul explains that this model was influenced by the ‘return to the sources’ of the early Church. “In fact, the emerging model of personality and interpersonal encounter seemed to better articulate and disclose more adequately the mystery of the liturgical experience and the life of grace recorded in these sources.”

\(^{210}\) Power, 57.

\(^{211}\) Power, 44. Interestingly, it seems that both the postmodern approach and Fr. Kavanagh’s theology would look at liturgical revisions that are textual or purely language-based to be less than ideal. As noted above in the section on current liturgical changes, Fr. Kavanagh would have supported the changes, but not without a critical eye to the process of change and how they might be received. In many ways, I think the postmodern theologians considered in this paper might not even feel the need to comment on the changes.
Kavanagh’s theology did not move into the new cultural phase, particularly as his scholarship was nearing its end and in his most mature works.

This is seen most clearly in Fr. Kavanagh’s writing on the rites of initiation. Without recapping his theology of initiation, one can see that the historical model of baptism, confirmation, Eucharist is considered by Fr. Kavanagh to be ideal. His theological insistence on this approach to initiation is based largely on the RCIA and its reliance on a historical model of the sacraments. Fr. Kavanagh considers this to be the norm of baptism and while he espouses understanding the pastoral concerns of changing the timing of infant baptism, he does not really provide pastorally-based answers to the problem. Fr. Kavanagh recognized that rites of passage are important both religiously and culturally, but he was not willing to have the liturgy conform to culture. Rather, it was his stance that the role of liturgy was to bring culture in-line with God. This is different than the approach of postmodernity. As noted above, Worgul explains that “[e]ach sacrament is in its own way a rite of passage.” This shows sensitivity to the human need to mark change, particularly changes in life. Leijssen also shows a pastoral

The revision of language may be seen as an attempt to ‘shore up’ the liturgy without addressing the reality of cultural change in which the Church finds itself.

See Chapter four and critique in Chapter five.

It should be noted that I agree with the historical approach to the sacrament of initiation. I agree that this timing of the sacraments does much to preserve the integrity of Eucharist as the high point of liturgical life. I also agree that confirmation in adolescence does not always lead to a mature faith life, and that better liturgical catechesis (perhaps in the form of mystagogy) is needed for both adolescents and adults. That said, I appreciate that postmodern theology attempts to meet people where they are. If the cultural need for rites of passage are indicated, then the sacraments are able to assist people in growing their relationship with the worshiping community.

Cf. Worgul, “The Ecclesiology of The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” 159-169. Without taking away the historical connection, the tone of this article is much less about the Church reappropriating the ancient formula and more about the Church recognizing the need for a change in the way it initiates adults in light of changing cultural circumstances.


This again is part of Fr. Kavanagh’s thought on the liturgy as the Church doing the World. In On Liturgical Theology, Chapter four, he explains that the liturgical practice of Christians gradually changed the pagan culture of Rome.

sense to initiation by affirming the legitimacy of infant baptism and practices that seek to engage the parents into recognizing their commitment to continuing their child’s Christian upbringing.\textsuperscript{218} Fr. Kavanagh does not provide this type of insight to the sacraments of initiation. Nor does he offer real suggestions of how the actual practice of initiation should be changed. He simply critiques it from the perspective of history and suggests that changes should be made.

The postmodern critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is that it is lacking in recognizing shifting cultural needs and attitudes. It relies too heavily on God’s presence without taking into account God’s absence and the actual suffering experienced in the lives of human beings. A critique by Marjorie Procter-Smith noted in an earlier section echoes this assessment. Fr. Kavanagh does not offer us anyway to bring the liturgy into our lived existence outside of worship. While the postmodern theologians highlighted here also do not offer concrete examples of this, they do acknowledge that liturgy has to account for suffering and for absence. Liturgy and sacrament cannot presume presence or presume to ‘know’ God as an object. Liturgy must prepare people to understand that God continues to offer the gift of God’s love freely and without expectation, but that we must understand ourselves as the ones being gazed at by God. We cannot view God; the gaze does not begin from our perspective, but only from God’s perspective. We do not create these encounters with God, but find ourselves in these encounters. It offers us a reminder that our existence is a loving, free gift from God. Fr. Kavanagh would not disagree with this assessment, and his theology, particularly his historical approach, still

\textsuperscript{218} Leijssen, \textit{With the Silent Glimmer of God’s Spirit}, 45. In his section on Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, he also expresses his support for confirmation in adolescence, noting personal experiences of how committed this age group is to living a life of mature, responsible faith.
offers valuable insight into liturgy. It must be taken in his context and understood through the lens of postmodernity so as to take what is useful.

The final critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology will be with an eye to ecumenism and cultural diversity. Both of these issues are addressed in postmodern liturgical theology, especially the issue of culture, and on both of these issues Fr. Kavanagh was largely silent. A focus on ecumenical relations between Christian churches has been of import for several decades. And while there is some opinion that the current Roman Catholic hierarchy has moved away from ecumenism, ecumenical concerns are in essence cultural concerns, and the postmodern approach to theology takes these cultural concerns seriously. Both of these concerns deal with the reality of change in the Church and in liturgical practice. Ecumenism, of course, is needed to address the fissures that happen when change creates a break in communion. The fact remains that change in the liturgy is normal, and that in its growth over time, the Western liturgy has changed in response to the culture in which it finds itself. Fr. Kavanagh was aware of the historical nature of change in the liturgy. When discussing rubrics and ritual he explained that change is important to the very nature of ritual. What he is silent about is the way liturgical change should address the issues of ecumenism and cultural diversity.

In his section on ritual action, Power notes that the spirit of ecumenism has begun to influence both Catholic and Protestant views of sacrament. “Catholic theologians recovered an understanding of the power of the Word…For their part, Anglican and

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219 See Turner, “The Roman Missal: Preparation and Reception,” where he expresses dismay that the current changes to the liturgy did not include voices from other Christian Churches.
220 Cf. Klauser.
221 See Chapter two and Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*. 
Protestant scholars have attended to the power of sign and symbol in sacramental celebration.” The same issues of postmodernity, it’s questioning of foundations and its need to address the reality of the human condition, are being worked out in many of the Christian confessions. Given the importance of ecumenism following Vatican II and its continuing concern in the decades following, it is curious that Fr. Kavanagh wrote only one article that directly confronted this issue. “Baptism: The Ecumenical Key,” is the only article that overtly addresses the topic. His premise in this article is that ecumenism is fostered by the growing attitude of recognizing the baptisms of other Christian confessions. Christian life is entered into through baptism, and it is the foundation of all other liturgical practices. “In short, everything in Christian life hinges on baptism, even the eucharist and all it signifies and causes.” Similar to Power’s observation, Fr. Kavanagh suggests that the Roman Catholic reforms to baptism have provided the Anglican and Protestant Churches with reason to explore the deeper, historical tradition that is common to all the confessions.

Fr. Kavanagh makes a few other insights regarding ecumenism, lamenting that while his Lutheran colleague and him share a common baptism, they cannot share in communion, but the majority of this article is spent espousing his view that baptism and the rites of initiation need to take a central place in liturgical theology. It is, in essence, a rehash of much of his theology of initiation with an eye to its import in ecumenical dialogue. He offers no suggestion as to how the bridge can be made between

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222 Power, 123.
224 Kavanagh, “Baptism: The Ecumenical Key,” 147.
225 He is speaking of the RCIA.
226 Kavanagh, “Baptism: The Ecumenical Key,” 147.
227 Ibid., 148.
recognizing other Christian baptisms and communion with other Christian Churches. Power offers a tentative approach to dealing with matters of doctrine that have kept the churches separate. Instead of trying to reach complete doctrinal agreement, he suggests that the project of ecumenism takes on the concept of *koinonia*. “This is not in the first place a juridical or sacramental unity, but it is a living communion which is served by word, sacrament and governance.” He suggests that this focus on communion, recognized as being in relation to the Trinity, will allow for both communion and differences between Churches. *Koinonia* also has the benefit of focusing on the sacramental and ritual actions of the Churches as a starting point instead of taking on doctrinal positions prior to recognizing any level of communion.

Postmodern theology is very attentive to the way culture and liturgical practices interact. The postmodern critique is one that rises out of culture, specifically dissatisfaction with the limits of theology and liturgy, and attempts to create a new approach to liturgy and sacrament that is relevant to cultural shift. This is, of course, largely with a view to Western culture, but the postmodern concern for culture is extended to the diverse cultures in which Christianity is practiced. Speaking of the teaching from the Second Vatican Council and the 1994 Roman Instruction on Inculturation, Power notes some of the shortcomings of the Church’s approach to other cultures. “[T]he instruction indicates that there is a certain coherence within the tradition

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228 Another limitation in Fr. Kavanagh’s theology is that in this one article on ecumenism he does not address the Anabaptist tradition. Those Churches which practice adult/believer baptism would be more difficult to fold into the Catholic, Anglican, Protestant and Orthodox communions as they practice infant baptism. Power recognizes that The Churches in this tradition could not be easily folded into even a broad sense of communion.

229 Power, 238.

230 Ibid. He notes that even this focus on communion will not be a panacea, “It is not even to deny that some positions may be irreconcilable and exclude communion.”

231 Specifically the teaching on substantial unity of the Roman liturgy.
of the Roman Rite that must be respected in adaptations made to its usage in different places and cultures. Thus one has to figure out what is unchangeable, as well as give attention to how the modification of a part may affect the whole.  

This obviously has ramifications for the non-Western Churches, but Power also notes that it is important to the way the liturgy is adapted to meet the needs of a changing Western culture. The approach of both non-Western and Western Churches when dealing with inculturation should move beyond theory and textual adherence and be addressed through sacramental celebration and ritualization.  

This is actually a point that Fr. Kavanagh would agree with, had he addressed current cultural issues. In *Elements of Rite*, Fr. Kavanagh stresses the importance of rubrics but recognizes that they provide a flexible guide to liturgy rather than hard and fast rules.  

Interestingly, he also explains that ritual and liturgy are always subject to change. “Whether the liturgy changes or not is determined less by individual elements internal to it than by the state of the faithful assembly which celebrates it.”  

This seems to be a nod to the notion that culture, that of the assembly, causes change to liturgy itself.

Fr. Kavanagh’s theology seems to recognize change, particularly the historical changes and diversity in liturgy of the ancient Church without applying the validity of this type of change to contemporary culture or to non-Western cultures. On one hand, he is comfortable acknowledging the change that he identifies as *theologia prima*, which necessarily changes future liturgical acts, while on the other hand, he is not comfortable with the way the American Church has incorporated the changes of Vatican II into their

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232 Power, 22.
233 Ibid., 23.
235 Ibid., 7.
liturgy. This is not to say that his criticisms are not valid, rather that he is more comfortable with the ‘legitimate’ liturgical changes of history, partly because the historical approach is so central to his theology. One would think that as a historian, he would have applied this historical approach, and the way the Church moved from the Hebrew to the Greco-Roman culture to the way the Western Church views the inculturation of non-Western cultures. Again, his historical perspective did not directly engage contemporary issues beyond applying criticism.

Despite Fr. Kavanagh’s silence on the liturgy and cultural diversity, it is worthwhile to provide a brief example of this contemporary issue. The example comes from the African Church. Elochukwu Uzukwu explores both the Western and non-Western inculturation of the liturgy. He provides a good reminder to the Western Church that our attitudes towards liturgical expression went through a lengthy process of inculturation and that we carry both the good and the questionable practices from the cultures to which we owe our heritage. The transition from Hebrew to Roman culture had a profound impact on Christianity. “[T]here is hardly any aspect of the Greco-Roman pattern of life that did not influence Christianity. The Christians decided either to assume these patterns totally or to adapt or transform them.”

The process of inculturation described was a founding element in Western culture. Given the importance of this initial inculturation, and its long history and involvement in culture, it is not surprising that the Western Church can be perceived as having difficulty allowing other cultural interpretations and enactments of the Gospel. Liturgy does not exist in a vacuum; there is no ‘pure’ liturgy or Gospel to which we have recourse that stands

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237 Ibid.
outside of culture. That said, if the Church recognized itself as a product of inculturation, it might be easier to allow differences in liturgical practices when encountering non-Western cultures.

Uzukwu notes a few ways in which Western Church’s symbolic and liturgical practice might not translate into the African Church. From a liturgical viewpoint, the question can be asked as to how attitudes towards the body and bodily gestures impact the worship life of Christians. African attitude towards the body was not influenced by Greek dualism and the pessimism it brought to the body. The ritual gestures of the Western Church are inherently influenced by this thought and this must be taken into consideration when formulating appropriate gestures for non-Western cultures. “We argue that such a pattern of interpreting experience, based on legitimate but particular sets of assumptions, may be generalized only by doing violence to other legitimate patterns.”

Legitimate liturgical gestures are dependent upon a particular culture. As symbols, they communicate to the culture, “they thus display a particular ethnic pattern of interaction within the universe.” It should go without saying that the ritual gestures of the African Church will be different from those of the Western Church. It seems that this is not always the case. It was noted above that it is difficult to discern what is unchangeable in the liturgy, versus what can be adapted. Gesture, as symbolic communication would seem to be one of the keys for successful inculturation and an aspect of the liturgy that is adaptable.

Uzukwu assesses the situation of inculturation in the African Church by noting that despite openness expressed by the Second Vatican Council towards inculturation, the

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238 Uzukwu, 14.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid., 15.
process has not been as successful in the African Church as hoped. “Indeed many bishops have placed obstacles to harmless practices, many have refused permission for experimentation and many more have ignored the whole issue.”\textsuperscript{241} It is as if the Church, in this case both local and universal, cannot recognize another interpretation or approach to Christian expression. This is all the more ironic given the historical and contemporary existence of multiple rites within the Church.\textsuperscript{242} The question of whether there should be a separate African rite is not one that will be quickly addressed by the Church, but as Uzukwu notes, “there is no going back from the emergence of local liturgies in Africa.”\textsuperscript{243} Liturgies in the vernacular, local hymnody and instruments and gestures have become an integral part of the African Church.\textsuperscript{244} This is a living, breathing example of the intersection between liturgy and culture. It has roots in the very process of inculturation that led the Christian faith to helping shape Western culture. Fr. Kavanagh’s lack of applying his historical understanding of that first process of inculturation to the contemporary issues of inculturation stands as an important criticism of his liturgical theology.

While the critique of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology from the standpoint of contemporary issues has found many gaps, the insights that his scholarship brought to liturgy should not be underestimated. He may not have dealt with the contemporary issues explored in this section, and his overly historical approach did lead to a pessimistic approach to contemporary liturgical practice, but what stands out about his theology is

\textsuperscript{241} Uzukwu, 30. The reasons for these impediments to inculturation run the gambit from the need for orthodoxy to the fear of superstition. See also 270, “Many of the leaders felt safer in prudential compliance with the received typical editions of the Roman liturgy…They therefore ignored the pluriform stance adopted by Vatican II on liturgical matters.”

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid. 266-268. Uzukwu sketches the historical development of multiple rites and explains that the Western Church currently recognizes two rites

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 270.

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 271.
that it was deeply felt. Even the criticism of the *embourgeoisement* of the liturgy and the Church had at its foundation a deeply spiritual appreciation of the transforming nature of the corporate worship of the living God. His criticisms came from the perspective that the Word of God enacted in liturgical celebration had the ability to change cultures, hold the world accountable for its sinfulness and assure the same world that its redemption had been won through the paradoxical victory of the cross. This is the liturgical vision that Marjorie Procter-Smith referred to as ‘cosmic’. His cosmic vision was influenced by his own experience of transformation by the liturgy. First, through is conversion to Roman Catholic, next by his ordination, and continually through his participation in the liturgy itself. He considered the liturgy *theologia prima*, not only because he witnessed the change it brought to the worshiping community, but because as part of the worshiping community, it also changed him.

**Conclusion**

The lasting impact of Fr. Kavanagh’s work is his passion for liturgy, his descriptive writing style and the unique perspective and questions he raised about the liturgy. Exploring Fr. Kavanagh’s work and theology has been an eye-opening and inspiring process. The author has attempted to let Fr. Kavanagh’s perspective influence her own approach to experiencing liturgy. This has renewed a sense that it is indeed the assembly, gathered in worship, which constitutes the Church. This experience has been a privilege. It has also led the author to other, interesting ideas for future research.

As noted, this study has shown both the self-imposed limitations of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology as well as the gaps he did not address. Now that the exposition of his theology is complete the next step is to take up a synthesis of his work in relation to
other theologians. Aspects of his core theology have most often been put into dialogue with Eastern theologians such as Alexander Schmemann and Robert Taft. While he was influenced by these theologians, his own theology is not nearly as robust as theirs. It might also be fruitful to put his theology in dialogue with others.

An area of future inquiry not taken up in this dissertation would be to locate Fr. Kavanagh’s theology within the realm of ritual studies. Fr. Kavanagh wrote frequently about the importance of ritual in human society and while he did not pretend to be an expert in the sociological aspects of ritual, he did allow ritual studies to influence his understanding of the ritual of liturgy. He viewed ritual in the larger perspective of human life lived in social community. Ritual in this context is patterns of repetitive human activities that “exist in order to deal with reality, as it is encountered, by establishing not the ‘truth’ of things but rather the coherence of human response to the real.” Ritual provides the language to communicate the realities of life that are incommunicable, and do so in a shared and public manner. Ritual in this sense has the very important task of communicating values, either social/civic or religious, to the group. Ritual communicates these values through shared experience rather than through rational discourse and assent.

Comparing Fr. Kavanagh’s approach to ritual to the work of ritual studies scholars like Ronald Grimes could potentially shine more light on the limitations of Fr. Kavanagh’s theology. Grimes’ approach to ritual obviously goes far outside of religious and liturgical ritual and often delves deep into popular culture. The author suspects that Fr. Kavanagh’s dissatisfaction with American cultural values, as he understood them, would lead to interesting dialogue between the two.

246 Ibid., 158.
An additional area of future inquiry would be to place Fr. Kavanagh’s theology in the area of sacramental theology. While Fr. Kavanagh dealt explicitly with the liturgy, it is this author’s opinion that he cannot be considered a sacramental theologian. His writings offer his understanding of sacrament, largely as the language of liturgy, but he produced no works that treated the sacraments in a systematic manner. This was intentional, but when comparing his works and his theology with sacramental theologians such as David Power, one gets the sense that Fr. Kavanagh’s silence on the complete sacramental life of the Church is a detriment to his over-arching liturgical theology. Even if one understands his liturgy as practical, it seems the he missed the opportunity to also provide a pastoral understanding of how the other sacraments relate to the life of the Church and to his fundamental theme of theologia prima. While these areas of inquiry go beyond the purpose of examining, synthesizing and critiquing Fr. Kavanagh’s liturgical theology, the author looks forward to potentially exploring these areas in future research and writing.
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