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**Children in the Assembly of the Church: A Practical Liturgical
Theology of Children and the Celebration of the Eucharist**

Rafael Capó – Iriarte, Sch.P

*Children in the Assembly of the Church:
A Practical Liturgical Theology of
Children and the Celebration of the Eucharist*

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in the Department of Theology and Philosophy.*

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In Memoriam

*Rev. Fr. José Mateo, Sch.P.
Teacher, Mentor, Father, and Friend
(1926-2005)*

*Dedicated to all the children and youth
God has entrusted to my Piarist Ministry*



Jesus Blessing the Children. Piarist House of Formation, Ponce, Puerto Rico.

Christ, living among the humble and blessing the children coming to him, calls us to the simplicity of the little ones when he says: “Unless you change and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Clothed with this same attitude of Christ, we contribute our share of working for the Truth by adapting ourselves more to the way of life lived by children and the poor.

Constitutions of the Order of the Pious Schools, n. 19

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Abbreviations

AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Saedis</i>
BCL	Bishops Committee on Liturgy
CEE	Conferencia Episcopal Española
CEI	Conferenza dell Episcopato Italiano
CELAM	Conferencia del Episcopado Latinoamericano
DMC	<i>Directory for Masses with Children</i>
DOL	<i>Documents on the Liturgy, 1963-1979.</i> Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982.
EACW	<i>Environment and Art in Catholic Worship</i>
EPMC	<i>Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children</i>
GCD	<i>General Catechetical Directory</i>
GIRM	<i>General Instruction of the Roman Missal</i>
ICEL	International Commission on English in the Liturgy
LA	<i>Liturgiam Authenticam</i>
LD	<i>The Liturgy Documents. Volume 2.</i> Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1999.
LMC	<i>Lectionary for Masses with Children</i>
LMCIn	<i>Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children</i>
RCIA	<i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i>
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>
SCDW	Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship SCDW will stand for all the developments in the Dicastery: S. C. for the Discipline of the Sacraments (1908-1969); S. C. for Divine Worship (1969-1975); S. C. for the Sacraments and Divine Worship (1975-1984); C. for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (1984-).
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

ABSTRACT

After Vatican II's invitation to adapt the liturgical celebrations to the different cultures and types of assemblies, a process of adaptation of the liturgy for children began to take place with the publishing of the *Directory for Masses with Children* and the three *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*. In contrast to what has been the pastoral practice in many countries, the Church in Puerto Rico does not have a formal childhood pastoral plan and has retained a liturgical rhythm with little concern for children in the assembly of the Church. Not even in Catholic Schools has the liturgy been subject to a comprehensive process of inculturation.

In this thesis-project the author reads critical pedagogical and inculturation issues present in the liturgy with children as celebrated in Catholic schools in Puerto Rico. Having a thick description of Puerto Rican children and the current Eucharistic practice in several Catholic schools around the Island as a first praxis, the thesis-project analyzes the issues using a practical liturgical method for a re-evaluation of the current liturgical praxis.

This practical liturgical theology of children makes use of different disciplines (theology, psychology, pedagogy, cultural studies) to study the reality of children, their spirituality, education, and their involvement in worship. The author studies the documents and rites of the liturgy with children and explains the process and methodology of liturgical inculturation of the Eucharist with children. After correlating the actual practice with practical liturgical method, he makes an assessment of what has been achieved in different schools around the Island. He draws attention to some elements that might prove useful for a continued inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist in the Puerto Rican school setting and concludes with the challenges put forth by an increasing demand for inculturation and creativity in the liturgy. This thesis-project demonstrates that inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist with children in Puerto Rico is necessary and possible.

INTRODUCTION

A prominent liturgist once said that never has the Church put so much interest in the integration and participation of children in the liturgy as has happened after Vatican Council II.¹ Prior to the Council, concern for children had remained in the sphere of preparation, of catechesis and education, so that they might eventually come to participate in the liturgy as adult Christians. Never before had the Church spoken of adapting the liturgy to their understanding, so that they, as children of God, might think of themselves as celebrating subjects of the liturgy and not as passive observers waiting to one day understand, at least partially, what was being done by the adults.

After the Council's invitation to adapt the liturgical celebrations to the different cultures and types of assemblies,² a process of adaptation of the liturgy for children began to take place. Several conferences of bishops began working on pertinent adaptations for the celebration of the Eucharist with children. Individual efforts began to take serious form after the publication of the *Directory for Masses with Children*³ and the subsequent *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children* and *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. This was a joint effort of liturgists, educators, catechists, psychologists and pastors.

In contrast to what has been the pastoral practice in other countries that have conceived pastoral programs and resources for the liturgy with children,⁴ the Church in

¹ J. Aldazábal, "Acoger a los niños en nuestra eucaristía," *Phase* 114 (1979): 495.

² Cfr. SC, nn. 37-40.

³ From now on, DMC: SCDW, "Directorium de Missis cum pueris," AAS 66 (1974): 30-46. [DOL 276].

⁴ Cf. the liturgical praxis in the mainland United States with many resources for the celebration of the Eucharist with children, as well as the praxis in Italy, Germany, France, and other countries with episcopal directives or pastoral documents in this regard.

Puerto Rico does not have a formal childhood or youth ministry pastoral plan, and has followed the *editio typica* and a traditional liturgical rhythm with little concern for young children in the liturgical assembly. Not even in catholic schools has the liturgy been subject to a profound process of inculturation.

Children's liturgies in Puerto Rico (almost exclusively celebrated in schools following the adult community's *Ordo*) ignore the existence of the *DMC*, the practice and resources from other countries, and the continuous liturgical and pedagogical reflection which have shed light on the topic. For this reason, I have worked on a thesis-project that will enable me to offer a concrete pastoral proposal to inculturate the celebration of the Eucharist with children in the setting of Puerto Rican Catholic schools. This thesis-project is a call to the Church in Puerto Rico, and to all its Catholic Schools, to promote the full, active, and conscious participation of children in worship and awaken in them an experience of the liturgy that will have the local culture as context.

When thinking about the objectives for this thesis-project I think about what the late John Paul II wrote in *Vita Consecrata*: we can only "transfigure" the disfigured faces in today's world with our own "transfiguration" (n. 14). So my main goal in ministry, through this thesis-project, is that I myself may experience that life in Christ which I have been called to announce, so that my witness to children and youth will be honest and coherent. That faithfulness inspires my desire to:

- Empower children and young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today;
- Draw children to responsible participation in the life, worship, mission, and work of the Christian community;

- Foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person.

In this thesis-project I will try to read critical pedagogical and inculturation issues present in the liturgy with children as celebrated in Catholic schools in Puerto Rico. Having a “thick description” of the current Eucharistic practice in several Catholic schools around the Island, as a first praxis or point of departure, I will analyze the issues using a practical liturgical method for an evaluation of the current liturgical praxis. I explain the process and methodology of liturgical inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist with children. After correlating the actual practice with a practical liturgical method, I will assess what has been achieved in different schools around the Island, analyzing the concrete response of children.

In the In-service part of my thesis-project I made visits to different schools around the Island, so as to evaluate the celebration of the Eucharist in these schools. I also coordinated focus groups with the assistance of local teachers and administered a questionnaire given by the campus minister to assess the actual response of children to these celebrations and their understanding. Throughout this thesis-project I will draw attention to some elements I identified in that evaluation, hoping that my reflection will prove useful for a continued inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist in the Puerto Rican school setting, and will identify some challenges put forth by an increasing demand for inculturation and creativity in the liturgy.

Thick description, as understood by Don Browning, will enrich the processes of my own reflection. Using Browning’s method, the general work of description of the children, schools, and liturgies, will lead to a strategic practical theology. This concrete description will bring into focus the collective practices in the social, cultural, and

educational context of Puerto Rico. It will critically examine those practices in light of themes that I will elaborate in a historical and systematic theology analysis.

The "thick description" will include my personal theological and ethical convictions, since they are embedded in my own formation and theological thinking and practice. Following Browning, the human sciences will also have a crucial role in my theological analysis. But, most important of all, this practical liturgical theology movement, as applied to my own ministry, will also have transformation as the final goal. This transformative work has God as an agent and the community and minister as auxiliary agents. Both enter into a dialogue that can enrich my own ministry with children and youth, in my Puerto Rican cultural setting.

This practical liturgical theology of children will make use of different disciplines (theology, psychology, pedagogy, cultural studies) for it is extremely important to have a strong and positive relation with the modern human sciences. They interweave many strands of motivation; the social, cultural, spiritual, pedagogical context of children in the Catholic schools of Puerto Rico.

In the general dynamics of the praxis-theory-praxis model that I will follow, important insights will be drawn from Robert J. Schreiter's construction of local theologies, as his methodology stresses the importance of culture and the necessary subsequent elaboration of inculturation models. Schreiter refers to local theologies for expressing the importance of the local church and stresses the role of culture in developing a sound contextual theology. His explanation of the role of the community, its experiences, struggles and questions, will provide clues for addressing the cultural aspects of my thesis-project in a way that gives importance to the experience of the local

children's culture. The consideration of values, symbols and meanings that reach out with hopes and dreams, often with struggles, give inspiration for a sound cultural analysis. But, using Schreiter's own words, theology has to be more than an acute analysis of culture and tradition. It is always done for the sake of a community. That spirituality, lived out in a period of time, provides in itself a kind of history or heritage, which helps to orient the community towards a transformative praxis.

Schreiter's insights on the *lex orandi, lex credendi*, help in identifying the relationships between liturgical tradition and theology, between worship and faith, giving light to my thesis-project, and hopefully enriching my presentation on the celebration of the eucharist with children.

I will also take into account the reflection of U.S. Hispanic and liturgical theology as proposed, for example, by Roberto S. Goizueta and Virgilio Elizondo. The task will be one of critical appropriation of cultural and developmental factors involved in children's spirituality. Relationality and sacramentality are thus considered to be fundamental realities definitive of human experience. Symbol and ritual, the communal and aesthetic, play an important role in the theological method that is used in this thesis-project. This analysis will arrive at the subversion of social forces as it is derived from the cultural character of communal and aesthetic praxis. I will take into account the *manera de ser* and the popular religion of Puerto Rico which presupposes and affirms relationality and sacramentality as fundamental realities definitive of human praxis. Popular religion would be the expression, in symbol and ritual, of the historical praxis.

Liberation and Latin American women's Christology will also challenge this thesis-project, as these Christologies are based in the personal experience of a historical

reality: theology is contextual, and as such, my own project should be enriched by the context of children spirituality and reality, and by the Puerto Rican cultural context. This should be done in a commitment to transformation, not just to finding knowledge, but sentient knowledge that leads to transformation. These Christological perspectives of Jesus' compassion and solidarity with those who are little and have least can challenge my thesis-project to transform the local Church's understanding of liturgy with children.

Through the process of liturgical inculturation, where the texts and rites used in worship by the local church are inserted in the framework of culture, I will try to absorb the thought, language and ritual patterns of Puerto Rican children. This process is one of the goals of this thesis-project, so that the texts and rites used in the celebration of the Eucharist with children will assimilate the children's thought, language, value, ritual, symbolic, and artistic pattern.

A special importance will be given to language connections with the liturgy. The initial thick-description will lead to an investigation of language issues in the Puerto Rican children's comprehension of liturgical texts and Biblical readings. Dynamic equivalence will be one of the methods in adapting texts to the children's assembly. By its application in children's liturgy we will try to re-express the linguistic, ritual and symbolic elements of the Roman liturgy following the particular pattern of thought, speech and ritual of children. The result should be a liturgy whose language, rites, and symbols relate to the community of worship, as they evoke experiences of life, human values, traditions, images, of importance in the lives of the children.

The practical liturgical methodology that will be used will try to arrive at accommodations to the culture and idiosyncrasy of the children, corresponding to their

pastoral, pedagogical and liturgical demands. This is evidence of a process that is not just dynamic equivalence, but creative assimilation of the linguistic patterns, religious figures, and values in contemporary children's expressions.

The thesis-project will analyze the implications of the *DMC* and the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2000), in an attempt to inculturate the liturgy of the Eucharist to the Puerto Rican setting. After applying practical liturgical method to the celebration of the Eucharist in the Puerto Rican Catholic school setting, taking into consideration the insights of Anscar J. Chupungco, Mark Searle, and David N. Power, I will arrive at a concrete proposal for adaptation and inculturation. Church documents have encouraged this process of cultural adaptation. The *DMC* stated that "from the beginning of the liturgical reform it has been clear to everyone that some adaptations are necessary in these Masses with children". I will try to defend the importance of an "even more radical adaptation of the liturgy" supported by the section on cultural adaptation from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*.

I will identify the challenges that remain on the way to fully inculturating the liturgy with children in Puerto Rico and arrive at a liturgical model for Catholic Schools in the Island. But since inculturation is a living process, as culture itself is an ever-growing reality, intrinsically opposed to a static conception of life, there will always remain aspects to explore and investigate, before they can be attempted at inculturation.

This project of a practical liturgical theology of children will demonstrate that inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist with children in Puerto Rico is necessary and possible. I expect that inculturation of this liturgy will have to go far beyond a dynamic equivalence of single elements. Perhaps a deeper creativity, always in fidelity to

tradition, will be imperative: an imperative for the Catholic schools in Puerto Rico to celebrate a liturgy that remains relevant to its mission and culture and that has impact on the life of the entire Puerto Rican community.

***I. TOWARDS A PRACTICAL LITURGICAL THEOLOGY OF CHILDREN:
THE CHILDREN, SCHOOLS, AND LITURGIES OF THIS THESIS-PROJECT***

Many theologians begin their theological reflection with big projects. That is, they begin with the big theological problems, such as the nature of God as the creator, and work their way down to smaller concerns such as men, women, and only much later children and other creatures. They create vast, multi-voluminous systems of theological thought in which one of the primary concerns is coherence between one part of the system, say, the doctrine of salvation, and another part, such as the doctrine of the nature of God. In this classical theological system, children often get lost in the reflection or methodology of systematic theologies, as a relatively small area of concern within the entire and vast universe of theological reflection.

In this thesis-project I do not intend to write a systematic theology of childhood. Instead, in my construction of what I have called a practical liturgical theology of children I will “start small.”¹ I will focus on the particular question of the participation of children in the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic schools in Puerto Rico. Concentrating on this situation, I will not consider every theological doctrine in relation to children. I will pay particular attention to theological ideas, such as the call of Jesus to welcome children, the developmental and pedagogical contributions on children, and the liturgical inculturation issues in regards to children’s liturgies; issues that have the potential to contribute to the construction of a practical liturgical theology of children.

“Starting small” means to begin with the lives and stories of some of the particular children who inform my thinking and action and with whom this theology is

¹ J.A. Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), p. 12.

ultimately concerned. How does one gain access to the lives and stories of particular children? Between 2003 and 2005, I directed an in-service research project to study the participation of children in the liturgy and the celebration of the Eucharist in some Catholic schools in Puerto Rico. While this thesis-project is not a report on all the details of that research, the children I met in those celebrations and focus groups constitute an important source of connection with the lives and stories of particular children in Puerto Rico. The experience of those children is the primary inspiration for this thesis-project.

Starting small also refers to the particular writing perspective from which this practical liturgical theology of children emerges. In some traditional theologies the theological locus of the theologian's context remains hidden, deemed insignificant in relation to a theology written for the purpose of addressing universal questions for all people. In contrast, I offer this theology from a specifically located perspective. This is my view of the lives of children in Catholic schools in Puerto Rico, as shaped through the lens of my particular Piarist ministry. My personal situation as a young Puerto Rican priest of the Order of the Pious Schools, with my particular formation experience in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Rome, and now in Miami Shores, affects the particular theological questions I pursue in relation to children. It affects the ecclesiology out of which I write and the way I search for a practical liturgical theology that truly welcomes children.

As a religious educator interested in the study of the liturgy of the Church, my personal background and identity places certain issues in the foreground of my work. Thus the kinds of theoretical resources I engage for the analysis of the reality of children and the liturgy are of a particular tone. I am interested in engaging interdisciplinary

resources that can contribute to a truly enriching and transforming practical liturgical theology for children in the particular context of Puerto Rico.

Starting with the reality of these Puerto Rican children, of their Catholic schools, I will then go on to a theology of childhood and of the liturgy that aligns itself with how God is at work in children's lives. In this case, starting small does not mean unimportant or less valuable. Small is a good place to begin, an essential and foundational place.

This is why another point of access and connection with children's lives informing this practical liturgical theology comes through my own Piarist ministry. As a Piarist priest, I exercise my ministry in the Christian education of children and youth in Puerto Rico. The goal of this ministry is education in faith of children and youth, following the example of our founder, Saint Joseph Calasanz. Sharing in the mission of the Church, my ministry aims at the integral human formation of Puerto Rican children and youth in such a way that they may grow "to love and serve the Lord."

This ministry provides me with the opportunity to know and connect with the lives of many children in diverse pastoral settings in Puerto Rico:

- The *Catholic school community*: I have been minister in the formal educational setting of a Catholic K-12 school in Ponce, and especially in San Juan, where I have worked as teacher, administrator, and campus pastor. This educational ministry has tried to provide students with opportunities to deepen their understanding and life of faith, to participate actively in the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church, and to celebrate their Catholic faith.

- The *Parish community*: I have ministered to children and youth in parishes in San Juan and Ponce. This parish ministry has involved coordinating children and youth

activities, parish youth group, and leading young people in prayer and worship, as well as in their commitment within the parish.

- The *pastoral work for vocations*: As Vocation Director for my religious province, I minister to children and young people in different pastoral settings. My vocation ministry involves coordinating vocational activities, organizing youth and vocational retreats, teaching young people skills for discerning God's ongoing call, and supporting them as they discern their call.

Through this ministry in Christian education, I try to stimulate a conscious and active participation of children and youth in the liturgy, so that by means of their festive encounter with God – in Word and Sacrament, in the Body of Christ, the Church – they may become new persons, a saving leaven for the human community. In the integration of faith and culture, and the celebration of the liturgy, I have discovered a charism coming from God, expressed in my Piarist ministry to educate children and bless them, so that they may grow to transform society according to the values of the Reign of God. This personal ministerial experience has also been ground for this thesis-project and a point of access and connection with children's lives informing this practical liturgical theology of children.

A. The Children that Inspired This Thesis-Project

The concrete experiences with children like José, Rosa, Pablo, María,² and many others, have enriched this thesis-project. Their lives, and the lives of those children in San Juan and Ponce who I minister to, and who I also met during my visits to schools

² I will refer to José, Rosa, Pablo, and María to reflect the experiences of different children I met during my visits to the several schools, but the names used are fictional, so as to respect the anonymity of the children.

researching for this project, are present as I analyze the reality of Puerto Rican children, the theology, psychology, and pedagogy that will be necessary to undertake a practical liturgical theology of childhood.

José, a second-grade student at Colegio del Carmen, in Ponce, loves to go to Mass at School. He enjoys listening to the biblical stories and singing at the liturgy. Though he does not understand everything, he knows he is doing “what God wants him to do.” His sister is getting prepared for First Communion and he would love to be able to receive Communion with her. But he will have to wait another year. And he looks forward to that.

Rosa is the active girl who wants to participate and get involved in everything. A sixth-grade student at Colegio Calasanz in San Juan, she loves to read at Mass and help bringing the gifts to the altar. She does not go to Mass on Sundays – “my parents don’t take me,” she says – but she loves to participate in the Eucharist at School. She even goes to Mass before classes, when she gets early to school.

Pablo, for the other part, does not like going to Mass. He thinks it is boring. He is a fifth-grader at Colegio Ponceño, in Ponce, and comes from a practicing Catholic family. But the parish his family goes to follows a very traditional liturgical rhythm with no consideration for children in the assembly. And since Masses at school “are also boring,” he says he prefers to pray at night “and that’s it.”

María is in third-grade at Colegio del Carmen, in *La Playa de Ponce*. She is getting prepared for her First Communion and loves to sing at Mass. She loves to go to the *Misas de Aguinaldo* during the nine days before Christmas at the Iglesia del Carmen. She then has the opportunity to bring her own musical instruments – she loves the

maracas and *pandereta* – to “play for Jesus.” She wishes she could do that every Sunday at Mass, or at least every Friday, at School, when they always have *la Misa de la Escuela*.

I have just remembered José, Rosa, Pablo, and María. Perhaps their names, and those of many other hundreds of students I met during my project, will not appear when we discuss the different aspects of the spirituality, psychology, pedagogy, and liturgical inculturation with children. But even though their names could be forgotten, their faces are surely in my heart and in my mind as I try to weave a practical liturgical theology of the Eucharist with children, an exercise that begins with meeting those little children.

Thus, to “start small” as a way of doing theology means to begin with the lives and situations of these children, real children like José, Rosa, Pablo, and María. It means to continue with all those children I met during my research, and that I continually meet in my Piarist ministry. It also means to make present other children not personally known to me. These unknown children are part of the web of connection in which all children’s lives are situated. This web of connection makes the faith commitments and liturgical praxis of Puerto Rican children relevant to the well-being of children elsewhere. Starting small means engaging the conditions of their lives, their personal situation, their school communities, as part of the “first praxis” of this practical theology.

B. The reality of Puerto Rican Children

A presentation of the statistics on children in Puerto Rico is important and timely for several reasons. It will help to build the foundation for understanding an important – and all too often disadvantaged – segment of Puerto Rico’s population. While most would agree that children’s lives in Puerto Rico are continuing to improve, we also know

that there are still some very pressing challenges that need our attention such as education and formation in values.

Children do not always get the attention they deserve from research or public policy. I would like to begin by presenting some data that will introduce us with the reality of children in Puerto Rico and will help us begin our road toward a practical liturgical theology of children. With this point of departure, my hope is that this project will promote exchanges and influence decision-making in Catholic schools in ways that will help to ensure a full, active, and conscious participation of children in the liturgy of the Church. Such exchanges have to take into consideration the reality of the 1.1 million children in Puerto Rico.

The reality of these children is a challenge for educators and pastors, but also for policy-makers, community groups, and the private sector. We all need to take a look at these facts and ask: What can we do to improve the future for our children? What more do our children need? What can be done differently? How do we pool our talents, resources, and expertise to better children's education and recognize children as true members of the assembly of the Church?

The implicit focus of the practical data³ that I will present has at its core the need to ensure that all children have the familial, social, educational, and economic supports and resources they need to obtain a quality education and grow up to fulfill their dreams and become productive members of society and the Church.⁴ The original report on this

³ The data has been organized by KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The principal activity of the initiative is the publication of the annual KIDS COUNT Data Book, which uses the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children. The Foundation also funds a nationwide network of projects that provide a more detailed picture of the condition of children.

⁴ Based on data from the 2000 U.S. Census.

data documents the situation of children in Puerto Rico, how it compares with conditions of children living in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and how the characteristics of children in Puerto Rico have changed over time. The census, conducted every 10 years, includes basic demographic information about age, gender, race, and Hispanic origin, as well as more detailed socioeconomic information about poverty, education, family structure, household characteristics, income, place of residence, and other characteristics.⁵ The following key points summarize the Census report's major findings on children in Puerto Rico.⁶

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of children in Puerto Rico decreased by 5 percent, from 1,154,527 to 1,092,101, while in the United States, the number of children increased by 14 percent. The number of children living in Puerto Rico today is roughly equal to the number of children living there in 1950. The drop in the percentage of the population under age 18, from 50 percent in 1960 to 29 percent in 2000, is linked to declining fertility rates in Puerto Rico and the migration of Puerto Rican families to the U.S. mainland.

The population under age 18 decreased in 50 of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities during the 1990s.⁷ The municipalities with the largest population decreases were Cataño

⁵ All Census data presented is taken from: M. Maher, *Children in Puerto Rico: Results from the 2000 Census* (New York: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).

⁶ This report was prepared for the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), a nonprofit, non-partisan, tax-exempt organization established in 1968 to reduce poverty and discrimination, and improve life opportunities for Hispanic Americans. NCLR has chosen to work toward this goal through two primary, complementary approaches: capacity-building assistance to support and strengthen Hispanic community-based organizations; and applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy to encourage the adoption of programs and policies that equitably serve Hispanics. Cfr. National Council of La Raza. *2004 Kids Count: Puerto Rico Data Book* (San Juan: La Raza Press, 2004).

⁷ However, there were five municipalities where the number of children increased by 10 percent or more: Toa Alta (30 percent), Florida (26 percent), Gurabo (16 percent), Culebra (12 percent), and Morovis (10 percent).

(22 percent), Mayagüez and Ponce (17 percent each).

Three in ten Puerto Ricans are less than 18 years old and, within the next decade, these children will represent the Island's students, workers, and future leaders. In this context, information on how our children are faring in specific areas and a better understanding of trends on a range of issues affecting children warrant attention.

Family structure is a very important predictor of the social and economic security of children and there has been an increase in the 1990-2000 decade in the proportion of children in Puerto Rico born to and living with only one parent. Outcomes for children tend to be best when both parents are actively and consistently involved in providing emotional, financial, and other supports to their children.

In 2000, about 27 percent of families with children in Puerto Rico were headed by a female householder. This represents an increase over the share of female-headed families with children in 1990 (22 percent). In the United States, the share of female-headed families increased from 20 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2000.

The share of families with children headed by women increased in 77 of 78 municipalities. The percentage of female-headed families with children was highest in Puerto Rico's urban areas, particularly in San Juan (41 percent) and in nearby Cataño (37 percent).

The study on Puerto Rican children presents a mixed picture of the status of children on the Island. Taken together, the data shows that there are several positive trends on issues related to child health and adolescent well-being: Both infant mortality and child mortality have begun to decline since 1990. The number of births to teenagers,

while still high and concentrated in specific municipalities, has declined, both for adolescents 15 to 17 years old and for girls under 15 years old.

In terms of areas of concern, the data suggests that poverty and education merit further research, analysis, and attention. Recent data and headlines paint a troubling portrait of children in Puerto Rico. According to the 2000 Census, 58% of children in Puerto Rico under 18 years old are poor. Moreover, a recent analysis showed that 59,000 children between the ages of four and 17 suffer from some type of mental health condition.

Depending on the source and definition, drop out rates range from 14% to 51%. In addition, local media reports suggest that several other issues merit immediate attention from policy-makers and the public: teenage pregnancy and unplanned births to unmarried adolescents are widespread; child abuse and neglect are on the rise; and substance abuse and criminal justice-related activities appear to be significant problems among out-of-school youth.

Research conducted by local organizations also offers information on the issues facing children in Puerto Rico. For example, a recent study by several foundations identified the following areas as the most pressing concerns for Puerto Rico residents: economic and social problems, including poverty and poor health and education services; family problems, including domestic violence, child abuse, and family breakdown; poor public health and education opportunities; and drugs/substance abuse and crime. This confirms data compiled by the State Office of Special Communities that shows that the most economically depressed and underdeveloped communities identified drug and alcohol use prevention and educational supports as two of their most pressing needs.

Far too many children in Puerto Rico live in poverty. It has been documented that child poverty is associated with poor health, negative school experiences and outcomes, substance use and abuse, teenage pregnancy, and other social risks. In 1999, more than half of the children in Puerto Rico – 58 percent – lived in families with incomes below the poverty line. American Samoa (at 67 percent) was the only U.S. state or territory with a higher child poverty rate than Puerto Rico.

But fortunately this index is in decline: between 1989 and 1999, the child poverty rate in the Commonwealth decreased from 67 percent to 58 percent.⁸ Child poverty rates tended to be highest in Puerto Rico’s rural communities.

C. Towards an Understanding of Puerto Rican Children

These statistics and the analysis of the reality of concrete children during my visits to different schools, as well as during my own ministry, permit a basic understanding of Puerto Rican children. I do not intend to be comprehensive, but rather present a list of my remarks on the reality of Puerto Rican children, as evidenced in the data, the observations, and dialogue with children and adults.

1. The World of the Child

The saying, “children never change” is possibly true, but the reality in which Puerto Rican children are living today is changing rapidly, and as it changes, it pushes children into a new mold. While not necessarily worse, today’s Puerto Rico represents a different world for its children, a different world from a decade or two ago.⁹ Parents are

⁸ In the United States, the child poverty rate dropped from 18 percent to 16 percent during the 1990s.

⁹ Cfr. M. Maher, *Children in Puerto Rico: Results from the 2000 Census*.

aware of the changing reality in which they are bringing up their children, and educators need to face the challenge of educating for this emerging reality.

2. Earlier Development and Consumerism

Children in Puerto Rico are being encouraged to see themselves as mature at a progressively younger age.¹⁰ Consumerism plays an important part in this regard. Manufacturers have realized that there is money in introducing pre-teenagers to the pop culture. Consumer capitalism and the Puerto Rican social and cultural environments spawned by it are the *habitus* in which contemporary Christian beliefs and practices with children take shape. The problem, then, is not merely the cultural construction of a distorted idea of children as consumers, against which a better, Christian understanding of childhood can constitute a correction. The Church faces the challenge of evangelizing their capitalist culture.

3. Changing Family Life

The nature of family life is changing rapidly. Practically every child in Puerto Rico has a friend who does not live with both their natural parents. As seen in the statistics, almost a fourth of all households in Puerto Rico are female-headed. Divorce and dysfunctional families are two important realities that also have a real incidence in the lives of children. Many children are brought up by their grandparents and attend Church on Sunday with them. It is not the child's fault if they cannot go to Mass with both father and mother. Families are also more mobile than ever, and frequent moves produce insecure and unsettled children.

¹⁰ Cfr. Ibid.

4. *Decaying Living Standards and Poverty*

The decay of city centers and the fragmentation of rural communities have trapped children in areas of poor housing – in *residenciales* or *caseríos* – with bad debt, high unemployment and frequent crime. There is a growing sense of injustice when the children compare their lives with the lives of the privileged few. This was most evident in the dialogue with children at Colegio del Carmen, in the poor *barrio* of *La Playa de Ponce*. Poverty is a problem for a great number of families and children suffer the consequences in the decaying living and education standards.

5. *Growing Awareness of Abuse*

The growing incidence of the abuse of children is alarming. With the alarming statistics, the possibility of emotional, physical and sexual abuse must be tucked away in the minds of all who work with children. Whether the incidence of abuse or our awareness of what has always existed is growing, is unsure. However, pastors, educators, and children’s workers must be aware that the pressures which lead people to hurt children exist within the Church as well as outside. And policies for protection of our children have to be implemented and enforced in all instances of education and ministry services.¹¹

6. *Access to the Media and the Internet*

The access to TV, video, the Internet and other technologies has brought benefits for the life of the child but at a great price. Today 82% of kids are online by the seventh grade, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project.¹² Figures for Puerto Rican children are lower but also growing steadily. Most of the children I met in my

¹¹ Cfr. J. Pais, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse* (New York: Paulist, 1991).

¹² Cfr. W. Claudia, “The Multitasking Generation”, in *Time* 27 (3) 2006: digital edition.

project have access to cellular phones, the media, the internet, and different multitasking devices. Social scientists and educators are just beginning to assess the impact of these technologies on children, but the researchers already have some strong opinions. Many educators say parents need to actively ensure that their children break free of compulsive engagement with screens and spend time in the physical company of human beings – a growing challenge not just because technology offers such a handy alternative but because so many kids, in Puerto Rico and the rest of the U.S., lead highly scheduled lives that leave little time for old-fashioned socializing and family meals.

7. Full of “Energía”

To ask a child to sit in one place for a long time is a futile request. But to ask a Puerto Rican child to sit at all is perhaps more difficult! Children in Puerto Rico, as most Caribbean kids, are full of *energía*. They excel in their music and dance abilities. As they say in Puerto Rico, “*los niños llevan la música por dentro*” – children are full of music in their interior. Some say this energy and rhythm is part of the essence of the Puerto Rican culture.¹³ That energy can be directed toward positive educational tasks, but it can also be redirected into the relentless need to fidget or disrupt. Those who work with children need to provide them activity, fast-moving experiences, and an opportunity to take part in what is going on. It is no use fighting a Puerto Rican child’s natural energy; it must be channeled into creative, enjoyable, yet controlled forms of expression.

¹³ Cfr. J.L. González, *Puerto Rico: The Four-Storeyed Country* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publications, 1993).

8. Looking for Heroes

Puerto Rican children are growing in a culture that fills their lives with local heroes: artists, musicians, sports figures, and beauty queens.¹⁴ Consumerism favors this trend and families watch their kids grow in a society with both positive and negative role-models. Perhaps in this line, catechesis has to work in the presentation of real heroes who chose Christian love, peace, and compassion instead of worldly values or violence. There is an urgent need of rediscovering the identity of true Christian heroiness.

9. Immersed in their Cultural Identity

Children are taught the values of their own culture from an early age. Encouraging involvement causes children to begin to “own” their culture. The presence of Puerto Rican cultural values was evident in all the classes, focus groups, and celebrations in which I participated. Puerto Rican children are conscious of their cultural identity and are taught to appreciate the folklore and customs of the Island.¹⁵ This has to find expression in children’s ministry and liturgy.

D. Catholic Schools in Puerto Rico

My study of children is inscribed in the setting of Puerto Rican Catholic schools. Catholic schools in Puerto Rico have played an important role in the education of generations of students throughout the five-hundred years of Catholic education in the

¹⁴ Cfr. J. Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and the United States* (Charlotte: UNC Press, 2002).

¹⁵ See for example the brief description of cultural and social studies in: Superintendencia de Escuelas Católicas de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan, *Proyecto Educativo Católico* (San Juan: Arquidiócesis, 2003).

Island.¹⁶ It has been a historical responsibility of the Catholic community to continue to strive towards the goal of making Catholic elementary and secondary schools available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who come from the poor and middle class. Pastors and Catholic lay leaders have always joined efforts to ensure that Catholic schools continue to provide an exceptional educational experience for young people — one that is both truly Christian and of the highest academic quality.

In 1976 the Catholic bishops of Puerto Rico issued a statement in support of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, entitled “*Carta Pastoral sobre la educación en las escuelas católicas de Puerto Rico.*”¹⁷ In it they affirmed their strong conviction that Catholic elementary and secondary schools are of great value to our Church and to the Island. The bishops affirmed that the entire ecclesial community is called to value ever more deeply the importance of this task and mission and to continue to give it full and enthusiastic support.¹⁸ Their support has been renewed in several occasions, even though there has not been another *Carta Pastoral* on education for a long time. In 1990,

¹⁶ The first known record relating to education in Puerto Rico may be said to be a Spanish royal order dated March 20, 1503 to Nicolás de Ovando, Governor General of the West Indies. This decree ordered that a church be built in each settlement, together with an adjoining house where children might assemble twice a day to be taught by the priest to read and write. Ponce de León complied with this royal command when he established Caparra in 1508. Five years later, the King of Spain ordered colonists to provide instruction in the Christian doctrine for the benefit of the Indians. At the same time it was ordered that native boys be taught to read and write and that the sons of caciques or chiefs be entrusted to the Franciscan friars for a four-year period of instruction, after which time they were to become the teachers of the Indian population. The first official notice of a school actually functioning in Puerto Rico is found in a memorial sent to King Phillip II, January I, 1562. For the first two hundred years, education in the Island was limited to the teaching of Christian doctrine, arts, and grammar. The Dominicans, Jesuits, and Piarists later on established schools that became famous because of their academic excellence. Cfr. A. Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: a Political and Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1983).

¹⁷ Conferencia Episcopal de Puerto Rico, *Carta pastoral sobre la educación en las escuelas católicas de Puerto Rico* (Fundación Suriñach: Ponce, 1976).

¹⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the Bishops of the United States also issued a statement entitled “*Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium.*”¹⁹ In this statement they affirmed that Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the fourfold purpose of Christian education, namely to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of our God is cultivated.²⁰ In that statement they pointed to the great value and the many successes of Catholic schools and the numerous challenges that they face.

Much has changed in our Church and in Puerto Rico in the ensuing years after the first catechists began the first schools in the Island during the period of Spanish colonialism. From the first schools of the Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and Piarists, and the famous school of Rafael Cordero,²¹ the lay educator of the poor who is soon to be beatified by the Church, Catholic schools in the Island continue to be valued and successful; but they still encounter numerous challenges. Much is still left to be done. Time has come to revisit and reaffirm a commitment to Catholic elementary and secondary schools as invaluable instruments in proclaiming the Good News from one generation to the next. Catholic education is a privileged way of “initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life” and is “intimately bound up with the whole of the Church’s life.”²² Perhaps we are now in a situation which is an appropriate time to

¹⁹ USCCB, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* (USCCB: Washington, 2005).

²⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹ For an interesting biography of this holy Puerto Rican educator (1790-1868), see L.R. Negrón, *Rafael Cordero Molina: Teacher of Great Men, Servant of God* (San Juan: Puerto Rico EB, 2005).

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference, Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Washington, 1997), nn. 5, 7.

review the challenges and renew the commitment of the Church to the education of children and youth in Puerto Rico. I am convinced that Catholic schools in Puerto Rico continue to be “the most effective means available to the Church for the education of children and young people” who are the future of the Church.²³

The children and young people of the third millennium must be a source of energy and leadership in our Church and the Island. Therefore, we must provide young people with an academically rigorous and spiritually sound program of education and faith formation designed to strengthen their union with Christ and the Church. Catholic schools in Puerto Rico should collaborate with parents and guardians in raising and forming their children as families struggle with the changing and challenging cultural and moral contexts in which they find themselves. They should provide young people with a broad-based curriculum where faith and culture are intertwined in all areas of a school’s life. By equipping our children with a sound education, rooted in the Gospel message, the Person of Jesus Christ, and immersed in the liturgical practices of our faith, we will ensure that they have the foundation to live morally, in love and justice, to face the challenges of contemporary Puerto Rican culture. This unique Catholic identity will make our Catholic schools “schools for the human person” and will allow them to fill a critical role in the future life of our Church, Puerto Rico, and our world.²⁴

It has been made clear in several statements, from the documents of Vatican II to Pope John Paul II’s 1999 exhortation “*Ecclesia in America*,” that Catholic schools play a vital role in the evangelizing mission of the Church. They should be the graced

²³ USCCB, *To Teach as Jesus Did* (USCCB Press: Washington, 1972), n. 118.

²⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 9.

environment in which Christian education is carried out, places of evangelization, of complete formation, and inculturation.²⁵

Catholic schools in Puerto Rico are often the Church's most effective contribution to those families who are poor and disadvantaged, especially in poor inner city neighborhoods and rural areas. In San Juan and *La Playa de Ponce*, in cities and rural areas, Catholic schools are often the only opportunity for economically disadvantaged young people to receive an education of quality that speaks to the development of the whole person.

The Challenges of the Future

While many look with pride to the many successes and achievements of Catholic schools in Puerto Rico, the entire Catholic community must now focus on the future and the many challenges that lie ahead. Pastors, educators, parents, and community leadership, should pursue effective responses to these challenges. We must then move forward with faith, courage, and enthusiasm so that Catholic schools can fulfill their important mission in our Puerto Rican cultural context.

It remains the duty of Puerto Rican Catholic schools to model the person of Jesus Christ, to teach the Gospel, and to evangelize our culture. These schools have played a critical role in this endeavor throughout the history of the Island. "Thus it follows that the work of the school is irreplaceable and the investment of human and material resources in the school becomes a prophetic choice ... it is still of vital importance even in our time."²⁶

According to "*Ecclesia in America*," it is essential that every possible effort be made to ensure that Catholic schools, despite financial difficulties, continue to provide a

²⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 11.

²⁶ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 21.

Catholic education to the poor and marginalized in society. It will never be possible to free the needy from their poverty unless they are first freed from the impoverishment arising from the lack of adequate education.²⁷ This remains a big challenge for the Church in Puerto Rico.

Catholic schools are a vital part of the teaching mission of the Church in Puerto Rico. The challenges ahead are many, but perhaps the spirit and will to succeed are strong, as was evident in the enthusiasm of teachers and administrators that were interviewed for this project. Adversity often brings out the best in men and women. We must respond to challenging times with faith, vision, and the will to succeed because the Catholic school's mission is vital to the future of children and the Church.

During my own experience in campus ministry at several schools in Puerto Rico as well as during my visits to three schools as part of this project of a practical liturgical theology of children, I witnessed the efforts of the Catholic school communities to address the needs of the children and face the challenges of our current culture and historical situation. In regards to the worshiping experience of children in the Catholic school communities, I also observed the hard work of campus ministers, catechists, teachers, and parents in preparing the celebration of the liturgy with children. They considered the Eucharist the center of their Catholic school communities and tried to express this in their worship experiences. Positive and negative results were observed in these efforts, but a genuine spirit of ministry with children was always present.

Before presenting some of the challenges and opportunities discovered in the concrete liturgical experience of these three schools – Colegio del Carmen, Colegio

²⁷ Cfr. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in America,"* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), n. 71.

Calasanz, and Colegio Ponceño – I would like to present a thick description that interweaves those experiences in Eucharist with children. Even though an actual account of all liturgies or a description of all experiences is not possible, I will point out the most relevant aspects of the celebrations at the different schools, and then present a concrete description of one of the liturgies in San Juan.

This thick description will permit the presentation of positive and problematical realities as well as some common observations regarding the worship experience of children in these Catholic schools in Puerto Rico.

***E. The Celebration of the Eucharist with Children
in some Catholic Schools of Puerto Rico***

The frequent celebration of the Eucharist with students has been a liturgical practice of these three schools for many years. All three schools celebrate the Eucharist with their students at least once a month. Parents, teachers, and administrators frequently join the children in the celebration. But each of the schools visited showed a different liturgical pattern as celebrations vary from school to school, as so does the participation of children in those liturgies.

In all three schools it was a little difficult to stay as an “observer,” or better said, as a “participant in the pews” rather than presiding, as some of the teachers knew me. Even though I came in with a theological and pastoral perspective in mind, I tried to place myself objectively in the last row of seats, trying to come from “outside,” so as to examine impartially what was happening. This task was rather difficult because a priest always has his own liturgical presuppositions and brings his own theological background to any celebration he participates in. Furthermore, in Puerto Rico, a priest would almost

never participate in a Eucharist without concelebrating at the altar. I cannot hide the fact that some of the teachers who knew me were amazed at seeing me sitting in the back. But being at the back of the church or school auditorium, and trying to remain just as a participant-observer, helped me to grasp some details I could not have thought of just from presiding as usual.

Colegio del Carmen, a small K-8 school in the poor *barrio* of *La Playa*, in Ponce, is a school of *Nuestra Señora del Carmen* parish. Low income families from the sector pay the lowest tuition possible in a Catholic school in the diocese of Ponce. Their children are sons and daughters of fishermen, construction workers, hard-working men and women. Most children are Catholic and have the opportunity of celebrating the Eucharist every week. Each Friday all students (250 children), faculty, and some parents, join for worship at the Parish church. All liturgies attended followed the structure of the *ordo* for the Parish community. The liturgy was presided by one of the Parish priests and children's participation was limited to responding and singing, reading and bringing the gifts to the altar. Usually two children (only boys) helped as altar servers and two other children read the first reading and responsorial psalm. Songs were directed by a teacher, without musical accompaniment. The prayer "of the faithful" was always read by the presiding priest. The rites followed the *editio typica*. Nothing was added, nothing was eliminated.

In my meetings with students and teachers, everyone seemed very happy with the celebration of the weekly Eucharist. None of the catechists knew of the existence of the *Directory for Masses with Children*, the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*, or even the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*. The only thing they asked for was

accompaniment of musical instruments during the liturgy. No one missed a more active participation and no one, neither the children or the adults, thought they could participate in a more active and conscious way.

The understanding of the readings by the children was sometimes very limited. As the *Leccionario* from Spain²⁸ was used for the proclamation of the Word, children did not understand many words, words not used in common Puerto Rican Spanish, and many times they did not know how to read the Spanish conjugation of verbs used in the Lectionary for the second person plural that is not used in their language, as Puerto Rican Spanish uses the pronoun *ustedes* rather than the Castilian *vosotros*.

José, the second-grader who loves to listen to the biblical stories, is a student at Colegio del Carmen. He said he enjoyed participating in the *Misa de la Escuela* and that he loved God very much. He would love to read at Mass, though he knows he is too little. María, for the other part, is a third-grader who enjoys reading at Mass. She also plays some typical musical instruments, like the *maracas*, *palitos*, and *pandereta*. She plays those instruments when she goes to the *Misas de Aguinaldo* every Advent season. She wished she could also play the instruments at their weekly school celebration. But that is not possible. The catechists' response was that "she can only do that at the Parish for the *Misas de Aguinaldo*."

Everyone seemed so happy with their *Misa de la Escuela*. But sometimes I got the impression they were a happy, yet dormant congregation, waiting to burst into an explosion of the natural energies the children brought within themselves.

²⁸ This is the official Lectionary approved by the Bishops for liturgical use in the ecclesiastical province of Puerto Rico.

The second school visited was Colegio Ponceño, a PK-12 school in the suburbs of Ponce. With more than a thousand students, coming from upper-middle and high-class families, Colegio Ponceño offers many services to its student body. Campus ministry is well organized and directed by a team of religious and lay teachers. The school has a big and beautiful campus, as well as an ample chapel for 400 students and a small oratory for personal and small group prayer in the Elementary school facilities.

Here, the celebration of the liturgy was not as frequent as it was at Colegio del Carmen. Eucharist was celebrated on special occasions, but at least once a month. Students had the opportunity of celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation the previous day of their school Mass, and most attended with interest. Teachers participated with the students but no parents were present at any of the liturgies.

As I was expecting a more active and lively celebration of the Eucharist than at Colegio del Carmen, perhaps misled by the many resources of the school, much to my surprise I encountered liturgies that also followed the *editio typica* without alterations. Children participated in the readings and service at the altar, but did not participate in any other forms, except for their responses and singing.

The liturgical books were always the same: no *Lectionary for Masses with Children* and no *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*. The *Directory* was also an unknown document to the catechists. The presider knew of the existence of the document but did not render it a necessary convenience.

Only two things differed from the Eucharist at Colegio del Carmen. An organized choir of third and fourth grade students, directed by a devoted catechist, lead the singing of the children, though always *a capella*. The other major difference, if this can be called

a major difference, was that children did lead the prayer of the faithful. Usually one or two students read the intentions of prayer.

Dialogue with the catechists and students was very different from the sessions at Colegio del Carmen. Though all children expressed their joy of participating in the Eucharist, the older students agreed that many times their celebrations were “boring”. One mentioned that he missed lively music, as he had in his home parish. A little girl said she wanted “to do something” at Mass. And Pablo, the fifth-grader who was always bored at Mass, got very excited at the insinuation that they could participate in some other ways, like reading their own prayers or participating in a dialogue with the priest during the homily.

Pablo, as well as the other children at Colegio Ponceño, knew something was missing. They did not know how to explain it, but they knew their celebration could be different. They wished something could be done. And the teachers were most willing to examine what to do so as to renew their celebrations of the Eucharist.

Finally, I visited Colegio Calasanz, an urban, middle-class PK-12 school in San Río Piedras – one of the old “barrios” into which the city of San Juan was divided during Spanish colonial times. Though a school with modest installations and facilities, its beautiful campus is home to 500 “happy students.” Coming from families with busy parents working in the chaos of the metropolitan area of San Juan, many children stay after school hours for sports or other activities.

Eucharist is celebrated with students at Colegio Calasanz at least every month, also on special occasions or Church feasts, as happened at Colegio Ponceño. *La Misa de*

*Niños*²⁹ (children's Mass) has been a pastoral option of the school, as the school has been trying to develop programs that foster the Christian formation and life of the students through catechesis, prayer, and worship.

Contrary to the practice of the other two schools visited, the liturgy at Colegio Calasanz followed the spirit of the *Directory for Masses with Children*, even though the document itself was not studied or known by most of the campus ministers or catechists. Many adaptations formed part of the celebration and there was a genuine attempt at inculturating the liturgy with children. Many students participated in other ministries apart from reading and the service of the altar, and children enjoyed their involvement in worship through singing, body gestures, and dialogue during the homily.

Rosa, the sixth-grader I mentioned earlier in this chapter, is an example of the way children at Colegio Calasanz love to participate in the liturgy. She expressed her desire for greater participation and, even though her family does not attend Sunday Eucharist, she is convincing her parents to begin attending the School parish, as she is experiencing her participation in the liturgy as something fundamental for her growth. “*Me encanta la Misa de niños en la escuela*” – “I love the children's Mass at School,” she said. “It gives me a chance to pray together with my friends and to demonstrate with my heart and my body that I love God.”

²⁹ It must be noted that this nomenclature does not make justice to liturgical theology. First, “Misa de niños” makes a childish reference to the celebration and forgets that it is the whole Church that celebrates, not just the children. The other common name, “Misa para niños,” for the other part, forgets that the Eucharist is the celebration of the assembly, not “for” the assembly, and thus, the children are not mere spectators, but participating and celebrating subjects of the celebration. The correct term is not “Children's Mass” or “Mass for children” but rather Mass “with children”. See J. Aldazábal “Acoger a los niños en nuestra eucaristía.” *Phase* 114 (1979) 501.

As this was the only school where I found that some adaptations were being implemented in the liturgy and that at least the spirit of the documents and rites on children's liturgy was being followed, I think it would be useful to examine a particular celebration. A "thick-description" of one of the Eucharistic celebrations will permit us to be involved with José, Rosa, Pablo, and María, as they worship, sing, and pray. It will permit us to feel the souls of the children, as they grow in their experience of the liturgy, and will help us in identifying the areas we will need to address so as to arrive at a renewed praxis for the celebration of the Eucharist with children.

The concrete liturgy I chose to examine is a *Misa de Niños* celebration at the Colegio Calasanz, on occasion of the feast of Our Lady of Divine Providence, Patroness of Puerto Rico. The presider was Fr. Benito Forcano, pastor, who was most glad to have me preparing a study of the celebration.

The assembly at the celebration consisted of about 250 Elementary school students and some 15 teachers and school administrators. A group of parents also attended, mostly mothers of some of the children.

The general structure of a regular Mass remained unchanged; however, in order that children in their own way and in accordance with the theories of child psychology, might genuinely experience "the mystery of faith... through the rites and prayers"³⁰ there were several adaptations in the different parts of the celebration, most of them in line with what is contemplated in the *Directory for Masses with Children*.

³⁰ IGMR, n. 15.

1. Introductory Rites

The assembly was gathered with the entrance hymn, “*Yo tengo un amigo que me ama.*”³¹ The children sang enthusiastically, using gestures as directed by a catechist. Most adults followed the singing by clapping their hands, in an expressive and cheerful expression of Latino culture.³² Gathered as worshipping community, the entrance procession came in, accompanied by several children and little *monaguillos y monaguillas* (altar servers, both boys and girls).

The introductory rites followed the traditional order of penitential rites, but an introduction to the Liturgy was read by one of the children. Three children recited penitential invocations, followed by the priest and assembly singing a joyful “*Señor, ten piedad*” (Kyrie).³³ The whole community then sang the *Gloria*. During the singing of a traditional *Gloria* the student’s attention was caught by a procession of children who brought flowers and candles before a crucifix that stood besides the altar. Even though the smaller children could not follow the singing of the entire *Gloria* they all followed the procession attentively.

The last element present in the introductory rites was the opening prayer. The priest invited the children to close their eyes and pray “in their hearts to God”. He then recited the opening prayer, based on the collect for the feast of our Lady of Divine Providence. The prayer preserved the substance of the prayer in the *editio typica*, but made simple adaptations in the language so that the children would be able to understand

³¹ Cesáreo Gabaraín. n. 257, in *Cantemos*. Santo Domingo: Ediciones San Vicente, 1992.

³² Cfr. L. Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

³³ This followed the suggestion made by IGMR, n. 30.

the prayer.³⁴

2. *Liturgy of the Word*

La Misa de Niños had the Scripture readings as the main part of the Liturgy of the Word.³⁵ Two readings were proclaimed,³⁶ taken from the proper of the solemnity of Our Lady of Divine Providence, both read from the standard Lectionary from Spain: the first reading, from the I Chronicles³⁷ and the Gospel, from John.³⁸ There were introductions to both readings, made by two children. The first reading was read by a sixth-grader, followed by a responsorial reading of the *Magnificat*. After the reading of the canticle of Mary, in place of the psalm, and the corresponding introduction to the Gospel, a solemn procession began, as everyone sang the *Aleluya*. Children came in with candles and flowers as a couple of students brought the Book of the Gospels. The students stopped before the altar to show the Book to the assembly while everyone kept singing the Alleluia with some scriptural verses. The priest then came down from the chair and took the Book to the Ambo, where he read the Gospel. At the end of the reading the children sang again the Alleluia, clapping their hands, as the priest presented the Book of Gospels to them.

While everyone was still singing, a group of High school students appeared in costumes, to present the Gospel reading in a little play. The theatrical presentation – that caught the attention not just of the children but also of the teachers and visiting parents –

³⁴ The DMC permits this adaptation of prayers stating: “the text of the Roman Missal may be adapted to the children’s needs.” But “purpose and substance of these prayers should be preserved”, avoiding anything that is alien to the literary genre of a presidential prayer (n. 51).

³⁵ IGMR, n. 28.

³⁶ DMC, n. 42, affirms: “If the two or three readings appointed for Sunday or feasts can only be understood with difficulty by the children, then it is allowable to read only one or two of them. The Gospel reading, however, should never be omitted”.

³⁷ I Chr 15: 3-4.15-16; 16:1-2.

³⁸ Jn 2:1-11.

ended again with the singing of the Alleluia. These elements made of the proclamation of the Gospel a whole expanded rite, with the joyous acclamation of the children giving unity to the single elements of procession, veneration, reading, and visual presentation of the Word. Fr. Benito then came down before the children to give his homily, in which he explained the Word of God, addressing the children and in a language accessible to them. At the beginning, the homily took the form of a dialogue with the children³⁹ and finished as a simple explanation of the content of the readings and an application to the life of the children and the families. In this way, even though the homily was addressed to the children it was given in such a way that the adults too could profit from it.⁴⁰ The whole assembly remained very attentive and participated actively in the dialogue. This was in part because of the spontaneous character of Puerto Rican children, who very easily interact, respond and enter into dialogue. Children loved to participate and kept raising their hands, as if they were at their classroom, willing to respond to the presider's questions.

After the homily, everyone stood up for the proclamation of faith, which was done using the Apostle's creed, since many children are familiar with it from their religion classes.

The Liturgy of the Word concluded with the general intercessions. Three children and two teachers came to the ambo to read simple prayers of the faithful, to which everyone responded with a sung response⁴¹ and the presider closed with a final spontaneous prayer.

³⁹ This is accepted by the DMC, n. 48.

⁴⁰ Cfr. DMC, n. 19.

⁴¹ "Señor, Señor, escucha mi oración".

3. *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

The preparation of the altar and the gifts began with the singing of the “offertory song” (“*Trabajar es colaborar con el Señor.*”)⁴² A pair of catechists directed the making of gestures during the initial verses. They eventually stopped directing the gestures as a procession of children bringing the gifts started to move towards the altar. This procession expressed the purpose and meaning of the preparation of gifts, and the children were happy to see their friends process with the bread, wine, flowers and candles for the altar.

As a group of altar servers finished helping the priest in preparing the altar, the priest invited the children to pray and said the prayer over the gifts. He again adapted the prayer in the Roman Missal to the language of the children, but respecting the original meaning of the prayer.

Fr. Benito chose the *Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children I*. He managed to say the prayer in a way that caught the attention of children, with tranquility and reverence.⁴³ This solemn mood made the children aware that something really important was happening. Even though the EPMC 1 provides for children’s acclamations throughout the whole Eucharistic prayer, these acclamations were omitted. Children remained attentive throughout the action even though they just participated with their attention and with the basic acclamations of the *editio typica*: the Sanctus, the memorial acclamation and the final Amen. The whole assembly sang these three acclamations.

⁴² J. Miguel Rivas de Dios. n. 260, in *Cantemos*. Santo Domingo: Ediciones San Vicente, 1992.

⁴³ The DMC insists on the importance of the presider’s way of saying the Eucharistic prayer. See n. 52: “Much will depend on the way the priest says this prayer and the children participate in it by their attention and their acclamations”. Cf. IGMR, n. 54.

4. Communion Rite

After the Eucharistic Prayer the priest used his own words to invite the children to pray the *Padre Nuestro* all with hands raised. The following prayer for peace was simplified from that in the Roman Missal, using a language more accessible to the children.⁴⁴ A festive exchange of peace took place, as children demonstrated affection toward their classmates. During the whole “rite of peace” the assembly sang with real enthusiasm this children’s song:

*“Amados, amémonos unos a otros
porque el amor es de Dios,
y todo el que ama
ha nacido de Dios
y conoce a Dios...
Por eso, tienes que ser un niño
para ir al cielo.”⁴⁵*

The song had a lively rhythm, and children loved singing this short hymn as they put much enthusiasm and emphasis in some verses. After singing, as everyone returned back to their places, a soft *Cordero de Dios* (Agnus Dei) was sung, so as to recover the prayerful atmosphere, temporarily interrupted with the effusive sign of peace.

The priest then made the usual invitation for communion with the response from the assembly. Before children approached for communion, a smaller child read a little prayer on behalf of those children too small to receive the Eucharist, asking Jesus “to come to their hearts” and “prepare them to receive him in communion”. The choir started

⁴⁴ The DMC, n. 262, says: “In order to get through to the children it will sometimes be useful for the priest to use his own words at the invitation to the act of penance, for example, or to the prayer over the gifts, the Lord’s Prayer, the sign of peace, and communion”.

⁴⁵ “Beloved, let us love one another / Because love comes from God / And everyone who loves / Has been born from God / And knows God... / That is why, you have to be a child / To enter into the Kingdom of heaven.”

a children's communion chant (“*Te veo, Señor*”)⁴⁶ and the whole assembly sang during the procession.

When the priest had returned to the chair, he read the prayer after communion, replacing just a couple words for more simple ones, for the final prayer was very simple in structure and language and did not need much adaptation.

5. Concluding rite

Following the prayer after communion, a girl read a prayer to Our Lady of Divine Providence, while two students from each classroom presented a floral offering to *la Virgen de la Providencia*.

After some brief school announcements, the priest said a few words to the children before the final blessing. This was a special opportunity of making clear the connection between liturgy and life. He then proceeded with the final blessing and the dismissal. Everyone sang the final hymn to *la Virgen de la Providencia*.

The whole celebration was festive, participative, and managed to actively involve the children in worship. Everything was intended to help children meet Christ with joy in the celebration of the Eucharist and to stand by him in the Father's presence.⁴⁷ Many details throughout the celebration were intended to respond to the local children's culture, to the psychology and needs of children, and to Puerto Rican culture as a whole.

This *Misa de Niños* constitutes a catalyst of a campus ministry that not just caters to children but unites the entire school community. It serves as the liturgical ground where children gather with their teachers and school administrators to pray and worship. It is not just the children that matter, even though the language and symbols used

⁴⁶ Tombolato di Mario. n. 275, in *Cantemos*. Santo Domingo: Ediciones San Vicente, 1992.

⁴⁷ See DMC, n. 55. Cf. Roman Missal, EP 2.

throughout the celebration are directed to the children, because the main subject is not just the child but the school community. Visiting parents enter into the mystery of God through the door opened to them by their children. More than a *Misa de Niños*, in the end, this is more a *Misa de la Escuela*, where the entire school comes together to pray and gather around the Lord's table.

6. Some observations

This description of the celebration of the Eucharist at Colegio Calasanz, as well as the worship experiences at Colegio del Carmen and Colegio Ponceño, proved to be an enriching experience. In the actual observation of the liturgies with children, as well as during the focus-groups with students, teachers, and parents, I identified several positive and difficult realities that need to be pointed out. This is a review of those realities.

a) Positive Realities

Even though in the majority of celebrations the documents and rites of the liturgy with children were not taken into consideration and thus a process of liturgical inculturation with children was not initiated, there were several realities that worked in favor of the worthwhile celebration of the Eucharist. The different schools manifested these realities in varying degrees. Here are some of those encouraging facts:

- The positive effects of worthwhile experiences of the Eucharist with children in the school and parish setting: Children were mostly satisfied, inspired, and happy with the celebration of the liturgy.
- The ongoing and effective education of staff, students and parents about the significance of Eucharist and its worthy celebration: All three schools

incorporated some catechetical formation on the Eucharist in their theological curricula.

- The effective and creative collaboration and participation of clergy, staff, students and parents in the planning and celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic school: Even though the degree of collaboration varied from school to school, there was always some sort of preparation in which teachers and some students participated in organizing and preparing the liturgy.
- Celebrations of the Eucharist that arise out of, and feed back into, the life and concerns of the school community: The reality of the local educational community was always reflected in the celebration. Teachers, parents, and students were almost always present forming community. The needs and intentions of the community were made present, as worship reflected the life and concerns of the school family.

b) Difficult Realities

But along these positive realities expressed in the celebration of the Eucharist with children there were some difficulties and problematical situations in terms of the reality of the children as well as the school planning and celebration of the liturgy.

Schools manifested these realities in differing degrees:

- The increasing number of non-Eucharistic and unchurched students, parents and staff: The reality is that most students and school personnel do not attend Sunday Eucharist with their families. This presents a big challenge.

- The increasing difficulty of having presiders who understand the psychology of children and who know how to celebrate in a school setting and how to address the students.
- The discomfort of some priests with particular aspects of school celebrations, for example,
 - student talkativeness;
 - seeming lack of devotion and decorum;
 - non-practicing students receiving communion;
 - degrees of formality, informality;
 - lack of prior or continuing contact with the celebrating group.
- The lack of real linkage in many cases between school and parishes, and between school and the wider Catholic community.
- Students, parents, and staff who are sometimes poorly instructed and socialized into an understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist.
- Unhelpful experiences of the liturgy at the school or local parish level.
- Lack of a clear theology of the Eucharist and how that relates to the practical situation in Catholic schools.
- The debate about whether attendance at Mass in schools should be voluntary or compulsory.
- The important symbolic value of the Eucharist in terms of perceptions of the Catholicity of a school.

- The importance of the Eucharist in the minds of those staff, parents and students who are very committed to parish and wider church in contrast to its seeming relative unimportance for other staff, parents and students.
- Attendance at the Eucharist without sufficient prior instruction or catechetical preparation.

All these realities were pointed out in the discussion with teachers, parents, and students. But the central topic of discussion seemed to be the conviction that children, in their special needs, should be given the opportunity to celebrate the Mass at the measure of their psychology and growth in the faith. Teachers and parents agreed on the importance of celebrating the Eucharist at school, not just because it is a sign of catholicity and communion but also because it is the *habitus* for the children's growth in faith and communion with Christ and community.

Apart from all the difficulties observed, notwithstanding the concrete struggles of each school, and perhaps the need for spiritual, pedagogical, and liturgical formation regarding the celebration of the Eucharist with children, there seemed to be an eagerness to learn, to grow, and engage children in a full, active, and conscious liturgical participation. There is an evident need for better prepared celebrations of the Eucharist with children, in which they become true subjects of the liturgical action.

Colegio Ponceño, Colegio Calasanz, and Colegio del Carmen are examples of schools in Puerto Rico that are claiming for a true liturgical inculturation of the Eucharist for their children, taking into consideration their spirituality, their stage of development, and culture.

The *Misa de Niños* at Colegio Calasanz in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, is a first effort in the way to that renewal. In its analysis I have tried to identify some critical inculturation issues present in the liturgy with children. Having that first “thick description” of the Mass with children as a first praxis, I will have to analyze some issues that will give light to this project of a practical liturgical theology of children. After correlating the efforts of the *Misa de Niños* in the Catholic schools visited with the contributions of a theology of childhood, as well as the assistance of children’s spirituality, psychology and pedagogy, in light of liturgical inculturation methodologies, I will try to arrive at the conclusions of a practical liturgical theology for the children of the Catholic schools in Puerto Rico.

José, Rosa, Pablo, and María were happy to share their joys, their dreams, and innocent vision of the mystery of God in the liturgy. They were sincere in sharing their delight in participating in worship. But they were also very sincere in telling of their frustrations and expectations as they gathered around the table of the Lord.

Perhaps José’s and Rosa’s willingness and desire to participate and get involved in the celebration of the Eucharist at their schools, as well as Pablo’s boredom and María’s *ritmo y energía*, will represent their fellow student’s desire for a full, conscious, and active participation in worship, as we embark now in an analysis of the different disciplines which will enrich the project of a practical liturgical theology of children. “Starting small,” with the children, schools, and liturgies of some Catholic schools in Puerto Rico, will take us now to dream big, as all children’s dreams are.

II. CHILDREN IN THEOLOGY: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

A. The Current State of Theological Reflection on Children

What does theology have to say about the experience of childhood? That question has to be addressed before we try to engage in a renewed praxis of the liturgy with children. If Christian worship involves ritual and symbol, then we need to ask, also, how these relate to the human experience of childhood.

What are the theologians saying about children? Out of all the recent theological literature one can barely find anything that deals with the Christian meaning of childhood in theological libraries. Liturgies with children, apparently, are an unresolved problem, not only for parents or educators but for theologians as well.

There are, I suspect, some reasons for this neglect on the part of theologians. Perhaps the value of childhood is not understood in its own right. Being a child is interpreted as something provisional and subordinate to the task of becoming an adult. It is a temporary stage of development directed toward adult maturity. The value we usually assign to childhood is governed by our admiration of its potential. Children are important not so much because they are children, but because they can become adults, productive members of society. Children are important for what they will become, for their future as adult human beings. They are also important for their innocence and lack of sophistication or understanding.

This is possibly the main reason why theologians and children have never gotten very well acquainted. Their worlds seem to glide past one another. The child's world is immediate in its meaning, sharp and colorful in its motion and shape. But the

theologian's world is a muted sphere of mediated meanings, an abstract ensemble of understandings, languages, symbols and traditions.

When we ask what Christian theology might contribute to the academic and pastoral debate about children or how it might help us to reflect on our obligations to them in the Christian community and its liturgical praxis, one can easily suspect that it has very little to offer. The grounds for this suspicion are compelling and are twofold.

In the first place, until very recently, issues related to children have tended to be marginal in almost every area of contemporary theology. For example, systematic theologians have said little about children, and they have not regarded serious reflection on children as a high priority. Todd Whitmore has claimed that there is no well-developed Catholic social teaching on the nature of children and why we should care about and for them.¹ Although the Church has highly developed teachings on other issues, such as abortion, economic justice, and moral conduct in war, theologians have not offered sustained reflection on the nature of children or on the obligations that parents, the state, and the Church have to nurture children.² Furthermore, children do not play a role in the way that systematic theologians think about central theological themes, such as the human condition, the nature of faith, and the life and worship of the Church. Certainly, particular issues regarding children have been addressed in theological reflection on the family. However, as Whitmore points out, for the most part, Church teaching simply admonishes the parents to educate their children in the faith and children

¹ T.D. Whitmore, T. Winright, "Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching," *The Challenge of Global Stewardship* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp.161-185.

² Cfr. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003); Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington: USCCB, 2005).

to obey their parents. The absence of a well-developed, historically and biblically informed reflection on children in contemporary theology explains why many churches often struggle to create and to sustain strong programs in religious education and in children's ministries.

In the second place, since little serious attention has been given to children in contemporary theology, assumptions about Christian perspectives on children are often shaped by other realities, for example, the recent and disturbing studies about child sexual abuse.³ There are several simplistic views of children and the ethical obligations to them that perhaps are related to inadequate commitment to children in the Church and the wider culture. Scholars have argued, for example, that in a consumer culture a market mentality influences attitudes toward children.⁴ Thus, instead of seeing children as having inherent worth, they are viewed as being commodities. Children are considered property when parents subtly say that they belong to them or view them more as expressions of themselves than beings with intrinsic worth. In Puerto Rico, as well as the rest of American society, children are also certainly understood as major consumers, and corporations market countless goods to children in TV shows, videos, and fast-food restaurants. Adults also treat many children, especially the poor, as burdens and do not supply the resources they need to thrive. Other scholars note that children tend to be viewed as either all good or all bad⁵. For example, popular magazines or newspapers tend

³ Cfr. J. Pais, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse*, (New York: Paulist, 1991). This is an important study that offers a personal and theological understanding of the problems and needs of children subjected to child abuse.

⁴ Cfr. L. Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 56-92.

⁵ Cfr. M. Eletta, *What Child is This? Children in Christian History and Theology* (New York: Fortress, 2001).

to depict infants and young children as pure and innocent beings to be adored and teenagers as hidden and dark creatures to be feared.⁶

B. *Children: A Neglected Theme in Catholic Theology and Social Teaching*

In “*Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching*,”⁷ Todd Whitmore claims that in its many statements on the family, Catholic teaching has concentrated mainly on the responsibilities of parents with respect to the procreation of children. While referencing children in a family context is consistent with Christian anthropology’s understanding of the social nature of the person, Whitmore argues that Catholic social teaching lacks systematic reflection on what a child is and thus children themselves remain an underdeveloped theme in theology:

Although the rudiments are scattered here and there, there is no developed Catholic teaching on children like there is, say, on the conduct of war or the possession of private property. There is the assumption that we all know who and what children are and why we should care about them. Historical shifts in social views of children indicate that such views cannot be taken for granted.⁸

Whitmore highlights the urgent need to develop a stronger Catholic social teaching by synthesizing the scattered fragments that deal with children. He provides a description of the state of children in today’s world, noting both the “silent emergencies” (disease, malnutrition, AIDS, poverty, and others) and the “loud emergencies” (war, genocide, the “culture of violence”) that characterize the plight of children today.

⁶ Cfr. V.C. Strasburger, et al., *Children, Adolescents, and the Media* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 8-12.

⁷ In *The Challenge of Global Stewardship*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 161-85.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 165.

Whitmore gives a comprehensive analysis of the understanding of children arguing that the unrestrained economic liberalism that characterizes global capitalism is based upon a market anthropology which sees children as commodities, consumers, or burdens.⁹ He explains the destructive potential that capitalist market anthropology bears toward children and illustrates how Catholic social teaching provides a critical resource to counter it. In the process, he cites Karl Rahner and laments that, despite the extended treatment of procreative issues in Catholicism, there is no real consideration of children as a distinct question.¹⁰ Ironically, Whitmore leaves aside the question of what Rahner can exactly contribute to the subject of Catholic teaching on children.

Several recent studies, however, are beginning to provide ideas to enrich pastoral theological reflection on children, thereby enabling theologians to contribute more fully to the debate about children today.¹¹ This is especially the case in the areas of pastoral care ethics.¹² For example, several pastoral theologians have generated a number of new studies that focus directly on the family and in this way are shedding light on issues regarding children.¹³

Although research regarding children is beginning to emerge within several schools of theology, the current literature still lacks a full account of past theological perspectives on children. The history of Christianity contains many other sources that have reflected more extensively – and, in some cases, with more insight – on children.

⁹ Cfr. T.D. Whitmore, T. Winright. “Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching,” pp. 167-171.

¹⁰ Cfr. Ibid, p. 161.

¹¹ See for example: P.D. Couture, *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2000); J. Pais, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse*.

¹² Cfr. J. McNiff, et al., *Rethinking Pastoral Care* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 32-40.

¹³ Cfr. J.A. Hanlon Rubio, *Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2003).

Just as feminist and womanist theologies have recognized that the critical examination of views of women within the Christian tradition must be included,¹⁴ a study of both the possibilities and the limitations of Christian perspectives on children must incorporate an account of how some of the influential figures in the history of theology have thought about and acted toward children.

Scripture speaks of children as gifts of God, signs of God's blessing, and sources of joy.¹⁵ Others depict children as ignorant and capricious and in need of education and strict discipline. Still others urge parents to love children with Christ-like compassion and not to provoke them to anger. In the Gospels, children are depicted in striking and even radical ways. At a time when children occupied a low position in society, Jesus receives children, blesses them, touches them, and heals them, and he is indignant toward those who have contempt for them.¹⁶ Jesus identifies with a child and equates welcoming a little child in his name to welcoming himself and the One who sent him.¹⁷ Furthermore, he depicts children as models for adults of entering the reign of God, as models of greatness in this reign, and even as vehicles of divine revelation.¹⁸ The ways in which theologians wrestle with these diverse biblical texts and the particular texts that they eventually either incorporate into their theology or neglect determine in large part their particular perspectives on children and our obligations to them.

¹⁴ Such studies also shed light on a practical theological study of children. See for example: A.M. Isasi-Díaz, et al., *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in the Third World Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988); J.A. Mercer. *Welcoming Children. A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Cfr. R.B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), p. 49.

¹⁶ Cfr. Mt 18:3; Mk 10:13-16.

¹⁷ Cfr. Mt 18:1-5; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48.

¹⁸ Cfr. H.R. Weber, *Jesus and the Children* (Loveland: Treehaus, 1994).

In addition, the study of past theological perspectives discloses that childhood has not always been a marginal theme in theology. Although references to children are often scattered throughout a theologian's writings and not discussed in a systematic way, some theologians have reflected on some issues of child rearing, their education, moral, and spiritual formation. Several theologians wrote catechisms and were directly involved with the education of children and more practical concerns of the Church. However, this is generally not the case among most twentieth-century systematic theologians. But there are exceptions, and the ideas of some central twentieth-century theologians, such as Karl Rahner (1904-1984) can have rich implications for our view of children today.¹⁹ However, even he, like most theologians today, did not develop full-fledged teachings about children or their spiritual formation.

On the other hand, those theologians who lift up more positive conceptions of the nature of children by speaking of them as gifts of God, signs of divine blessing, images of God, vehicles of revelation, and examples to adults, challenge us to re-examine other common attitudes toward children in the Church and in contemporary culture. By speaking of children in such striking ways, these theologians warn those within the Church not to be satisfied with theological teachings of children that depict them solely as sinful or in need of instruction. They also challenge all readers – whether inside or outside the Church – to examine common yet harmful attitudes toward children in contemporary culture.

¹⁹ I will later consider Rahner's article "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," *Theological Investigations* 8 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1971), as an important contribution towards a theology of childhood.

C. *Encouraging a Theological View of Children*

In order to overcome the simplistic views of children and strengthen the commitment of the Church to them we need to rediscover the presence of children in the Bible, as well as the Christian tradition and history. Although theologians have often expressed narrow and even negative depictions of children and childhood, I would like to explain five ways of speaking about the nature of children within the Christian tradition that – when critically retrieved and held in tension – can broaden the conception of children and strengthen our commitment to them. I have already made reference to them:

1. Children as Gifts of God and Sources of Joy

First, the Bible and the Christian tradition often depict children as gifts of God, who ultimately come from God and belong to God, and are sources of joy and pleasure. Many passages in the Bible speak of children as gifts of God or signs of God’s blessing.²⁰ Several texts indicate that parents who receive these precious gifts are being remembered by God (Gen 30:22; 1 Sam 1:11,19) and given “good fortune” (Gen 30:11). To be fruitful, to have many children, is to receive God’s blessing. The Psalmist says children are a “heritage” from the Lord and a “reward” (Ps 127:3).

Children are God’s gifts not only to their parents, but also to the community. They are members of a community from the start, and they play various and complex roles within it. In addition, they will grow up to be not only sons and daughters but also husbands, wives, friends, neighbors, and citizens. Viewing children as gifts of God to the whole community radically challenges common assumptions of them as property of parents or economic burdens to the community.

²⁰ See, for example, Gen 17:16, 28:3, and 49:25; Ex 23:25-26; Dt 7:13-14, 28:11, and 30:9; Job 5:25; Ps 127:3-5 and 128:3-4. See several other biblical references to children as “gifts” in R.B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible*, p. 49.

Related to this notion that children are gifts and signs of God's blessing, the Bible and Christian tradition speak of them as sources of joy and pleasure. Here, too, there are many examples. Abraham and Sarah rejoice at the birth of their son, Isaac. An angel promises Zechariah and Elizabeth that their child will bring them "joy and gladness" (Lk 1:14). In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world" (Jn 16:20-21).

There is a sense today and in the past that one of the great blessings of interactions with children is simply the joy and pleasure they provide, and this is evident in the liturgical assembly that values the presence and participation of children.

2. Children as Sinful Creatures and Moral Agents

Second, the Christian tradition often describes children as sinful creatures, because they are born in original sin and are also moral agents, capable of sin.²¹ This view is based on several biblical texts. For example, Genesis states that every inclination of the human heart is "evil from youth" (Gen 8:21) and, in Proverbs, that folly is "bound up in the heart" of children (Prov 22:15). The Psalms declare that humans are sinful at birth and that "the wicked go astray from the womb; they err from their birth" (Ps 51:5; 58:3). All people are "under the power of sin," the Apostle Paul writes, so "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (Rom 3: 9-10).

On the surface, this way of thinking about children can seem negative. When stating that children are sinful, this refers to their being born in original sin, implying they

²¹ This is developed in the medieval theology of the original sin. Reformed theology also deals with the topic: Cfr. Calvin and German Lutheran pietists like A.H. Francke.

are born into a state of sin, into a world that is not what it ought to be. It also means they carry out actual sins; they are moral agents who sometimes act in ways that are self-centered and harmful to themselves and others. A child has the capacity to accept some degree of responsibility for harmful actions.

But, although it is important to recognize that children are born in a state of sin and are moral beings capable of actual sins against God and others, another important aspect of the notion that children are “sinful”. is that infants and young children are not as sinful as adults and therefore need to be treated tenderly.²² They do not need as much help to love God and neighbor. They have not gotten into bad habits or developed negative thoughts and feelings that reinforce destructive behaviors. The positive way of expressing the same idea is that young people are more easily formed than adults, and it is easier to nurture them and set them on a straight path. This is one reason that most theologians who have emphasized that children are sinful have never concluded that children should be physically punished: they should receive loving guidance and care instead of harsh treatment.²³

3. Children as Fully Human and Made in the Image of God

Although children are developing, they are, at the same time whole and complete human beings made in the image of God. Thus, they are worthy of dignity and respect. The basis of this claim is Gen 1:27, which states that God made humankind in the image of God. Thus, all children, regardless of race, gender, or class, are fully human and worthy of respect.

²² Cfr. “Children of necessity, children of the Most High”, in S.J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993) pp. 63-74.

²³ Cfr. *Ibid.* p. 115.

This theme has often been neglected in the Christian tradition, and Church tradition uses language regarding children as “almost human” or “beasts” or “on their way to becoming human.”²⁴ But there also are some theologians that have emphasized the full humanity of children, such as Karl Rahner. In contrast to those who claim that children are not quite fully human or are beings on the way toward humanity, Rahner asserts that children have value and dignity in their own right and are fully human from the beginning.²⁵ Thus, he believes that children are to be respected from the beginning of life. They are a sacred trust to be nurtured and protected at every stage of their existence.

In the next section I will expand on these remarks about the theological significance of childhood as presented by Karl Rahner. His ideas for a theology of childhood are one of the few attempts I have seen in contemporary writing that aim to establish a sound theological basis for the Christian understanding of childhood. And such a basis, I believe, is a condition for developing an adequate practical liturgical theology of children.

4. Children as Models of Faith and Sources of Revelation

There are only a few biblical texts on Jesus and children. It is true that the Bible contains many passages where the word “child,” its synonyms and derivatives occur: the “children of Israel,” “sons of Abraham,” “daughters of Sion,” “God’s children,” “my little children,” and so on. However, all these expressions refer to a relationship or specify the origin of a person. They may include actual boys and girls, but they do not designate children as distinguished from adults.²⁶

²⁴ See W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), pp. 66-82.

²⁵ Cfr. K. Rahner, “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 33.

²⁶ R.B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible.*; R. Belda, *Al paso de los niños. Los niños en la Biblia* (Madrid: Analecta Calasanciana) n. 79, 1998.

During the last decades, only relatively few exegetical studies on Jesus and the children have been published.²⁷ There is no doubt that, behind the passages making reference to children, lies the memory of events which happened in the earthly life of Jesus, of the gestures he made and the words he spoke. It is not the scope of this study to offer an exegetical analysis and explain all the different texts about Jesus and children. But from those texts, I can affirm that Jesus confronted human views of people and events with the realism of God's kingdom. This led not only to a new teaching, but to the Christian community confessing that in the person of Jesus, the reign of God was actually anticipated. Within this anticipated reality of the Kingdom, children appear in a totally new light. They are a model of faith and a source of revelation of the kingdom of God.

The New Testament depicts children in striking and even radical ways presenting them as moral witnesses, models of faith for adults, sources or vehicles of revelation, and representatives of Jesus. In the Gospels Jesus blesses children, embraces them, rebukes those who turn them away, heals them, and even lifts them up as models of faith. He identifies himself with children and equates welcoming a little child in his name to welcoming himself and the One who sent him. "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus warns. "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom or heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mt 18:2-5), He adds, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Mt 19: 14).

²⁷ For an exegetical study of New Testament texts on children see: R. Belda, *Al paso de los niños. Los niños en la Biblia.*; or also, H.R. Weber, *Jesus and the Children* (Loveland: Treehaus, 1994).

In striking contrast to the whole attitude of Jesus' time toward children, Jesus put a child in the midst of the disciples in order to teach them a basic lesson. For him, the child was not raw material for education, but the symbol of true discipleship and, moreover, a true symbol of God. When Jesus put the child in the midst of the disciples, or at his own side, he said that with this child He himself and even God was present. So he commends the children to our loving care, as a welcoming of God's presence, of the reign of God.²⁸

The perspectives on children found in the gospels continue to be as striking today as they were in Jesus' time. They appear as a revelation of the kingdom and teach us a discipleship which is sensitive to children. They can become a source of deep insight into the secrets of the kingdom and an opportunity for spiritual growth for the entire worshipping community, who will discover the presence and participation of children in the liturgical assembly as a symbol of the presence of the Lord.

5. Children as the Poor in Need of Justice and Compassion

Finally, there are many biblical passages and examples in the tradition that remind us that children are also the poor, orphans, neighbors, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion.²⁹ There are numerous biblical passages that explicitly command us to help widows and orphans, the most vulnerable in society.³⁰ These and other passages clearly show us that caring for children is part of seeking justice and loving the neighbor.

There are many examples within the Christian tradition of leaders and saints who have taken seriously the situation of poor children. Throughout the history of the Church,

²⁸ Cfr. R. Belda, *Al paso de los niños. Los niños en la Biblia*, p. 45.

²⁹ W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church*, pp. 67-83.

³⁰ For example, Ex 22:22-24; Dt 10, 17-18 and 14:28-29.

committed Christian men and women have responded to the needs of socially and economically disadvantaged children. It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people deprived of any form of schooling. After the example of Jesus, who "saw the great throng, and... had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6:34), many have devoted themselves to bring justice and compassion, particularly to poor children. One of those saints was Joseph Calasanz (1557-1648) who has been considered the founder of the modern Catholic school, whose goal is the integral formation of children. As Pope John Paul II recalled: "Joseph Calasanz, was the first to invent this way of Christian charity: at a time when children were barely offered even elementary schooling, he took on the task of teaching the children of the poor free of charge, so that they would not be entirely deprived of instruction because of poverty."³¹

From that first formal educational experience of children by the Piarists, which was to be the origin of public schools in the modern sense, an example of compassion and love for poor children became a model for many religious founders and families through consecutive centuries.³² "Care for learning means loving" (Wis 6,17) and those children educated in the Pious Schools, the girls from poor families that were taught by the Ursuline nuns, the boys that John Baptiste de la Salle came across in the villages of France, those that were offered shelter by Don Bosco, or the many children educated by the Dominican family, were indeed loved, and continue to be loved by all those

³¹ John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter to the Piarist Fathers," *L'Osservatore Romano* 6:28 (1997): p. 5.

³² Cfr. Ibid.

consecrated men and women moved by a desire for compassion for children.³³ This example lives on in a world where peoples and persons are appreciated and considered only in proportion to their economic importance, to show the world that little ones and the poor continue to be the favorites of the heart of Christ.

But whenever people retreat from this rich view of children found in the Bible, Christian tradition, and history, and focus instead on only one or two aspects of what children are, there is the risk of falling into deficient understandings of children and adult obligations to them, and adults risk treating them in inadequate and harmful ways, even in the liturgy of the Church.

On the one hand, if children are viewed primarily as gifts of God and as models of faith, then they will be enjoyed and adults will be open to learning from them. However, their moral responsibilities may be neglected and the role that parents and other caring adults should play in a child's moral development may be minimized. In the end, adopting a hands-off approach to parenting, religious education, and children's ministries, underestimates the responsibilities of both adults and children. The weaknesses of this approach to children are reflected in the past and also today.

In order to avoid these and other dangers, a solid and biblically informed approach to children must take into account all these biblical, theological, and historical perspectives on children outlined here. It must incorporate a complex view of the child that holds together the inherent tensions of being a child: being fully human and made in the image of God yet still developing and in need of instruction and guidance; gifts of

³³ Cfr. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 15.

God and sources of joy yet also capable of selfish and sinful actions; metaphors for immature faith and childish behavior and yet models of faith and sources of revelation.

6. Implications of These Perspectives

If inadequate approaches to children in the culture and the Church can be avoided, and if all the biblical perspectives of children mentioned can be appropriated and held in tension, commitment to children can be strengthened in several ways.

Such perspectives on children could strengthen spiritual formation and religious education programs. If children are seen as gifts of God and sources of joy, then they will be included in worship as true participants and welcomed as full members of assembly of the Church. As a result, more joy and laughter will be incorporated into religious education at home and at the liturgy of the Church. Furthermore, when children are perceived as “sinful” and in need of instruction, then more substantial religious educational materials and programs for children will be developed in the Church, hopefully based on redemption and reconciliation. Christian education programs that emphasize the importance of the family in spiritual formation and faith development are more likely to be created. The growing moral capacities and responsibilities of children will be more readily cultivated in many other ways, such as by introducing them to good examples, mentors, and stories of service and compassion; by including children in service projects and teaching them financial responsibility; and helping them discern their vocations and explore how they can best use their gifts and talents to respond to God’s calling and contribute to the common good. Finally, if one truly believes, as Jesus did, that children can teach adults and be moral witnesses, models of faith, and sources of revelation, then one will listen more attentively to children and learn from them; the

community will value their presence, active, and conscious participation in the liturgy, and it will recognize the importance of children in the faith journey of the whole Church.

The five perspectives of speaking about children that I have enumerated could also deepen theological and ethical reflection on children and inform a strong practical theology of childhood. For example, if children are viewed as gifts of God and developing beings in need of instruction, then children will no longer be seen as belonging to their parents, but rather as gifts to them and the whole community. Obligations to all children will be taken more seriously, and theological and ethical reflection on the role of Church and state in protecting children and on the responsibilities of parents, school, and community will be strengthened. Adults will also begin to understand spiritual formation as a serious area of inquiry in all areas of theological, biblical, and liturgical studies, not just pastoral care or religious education. In these and other ways, we could develop a sound practical theology of childhood.

These perspectives on children could help renew the Church's commitment to serving and protecting all children. If children are viewed as having been made in the image of God, as fully human, and as orphans, neighbors, and strangers in need of compassion and justice, then all children, regardless of age, race, class, or gender, will be treated with more dignity and respect. Abuse or harsh treatment of children will no longer be tolerated. Leaders will warn against equating discipline with physical punishment. The needs of poor children will be given attention in the local community and around the world, as people work more diligently to protect and serve all children in need, and as they become stronger and more creative advocates for children.

There are many other implications of a complex and biblically-informed understanding of children. A more vibrant view of children can combat simplistic and destructive conceptions of them and thereby strengthen commitment to them in a number of areas. By appropriating a view of children that incorporates these perspectives on children found in the Bible and Church tradition, everyone within the Church can strengthen their efforts in spiritual formation and religious education. A stronger theology of childhood in the Church will also be facilitated, and adults will take up more wholeheartedly and responsibly the Christian call to love and care for all children.

D. Karl Rahner's Contribution to Modern Catholic Theology of Childhood

Even though those five perspectives from Scripture and Tradition have been more or less present in theological thought, Catholic teaching has given little systematic consideration to the existential nature of children. Perhaps the theologian who potentially has the most to contribute to solve this lacuna is Karl Rahner. Unlike so many theologians of his time and of previous eras, who only mention children as case examples to discuss other theological positions, Rahner wrote an essay, included in volume 8 of his twenty-three-volume corpus *Theological Investigations*, entitled “*Ideas for a Theology of Childhood*.”³⁴ In this essay, Rahner’s concern is for the nature of childhood as such.

Rahner’s essay represents a major contribution to Catholic theology on the child. Rahner treats “the unsurpassable value of childhood” and presents childhood in terms of his transcendental theological anthropology and realized eschatology.³⁵ He interprets the

³⁴ Originally published as *Gedanken zu einer theologie der Kindheit*, in *Schriften zur Theologie*, 8 (Einsiedeln: Benziger-Verlag, 1966).

³⁵ For a presentation on his transcendental theological anthropology and a discussion of different areas of his theological research, see: D. Marmion, M.E. Hines. *The Cambridge Companion to*

understanding of childhood in Scripture and in the Christian tradition: being both realistic and idealistic. In the last section of his study, Rahner deals with the theological understanding of what it means to be a “child of God.” In this essay Rahner’s approach to childhood builds upon the central ideas that undergird his entire theological project: God as “incomprehensible, holy Mystery”; humanity as fundamentally graced; and time as a process revealing both possibility and limitation.³⁶ The whole study offers a markedly positive view of childhood. Rahner’s concern is to view childhood as valuable in itself, instead of seeing it as a process of maturation for adulthood. He upholds children as having integrity, value, and faith, appropriate to their time of life.

I will now examine what Rahner’s theology of childhood can contribute to our contemporary understanding of children and for discerning what our moral obligations should be toward them. An examination of Rahner’s thoughts on children might therefore provide an important religious justification for treating all children with respect and dignity. It might serve as an incentive to develop better ways to foster the growth in Christian spiritual maturity of children as well as their participation in the liturgical assembly of the Church.

1. The Time of the Child

It may seem strange to introduce the topic of a theology of childhood by speaking about time. For many the child is a sort of human time-capsule whose contents are best

Karl Rahner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Here the contributors assess Rahner’s significance for contemporary theology by bringing his thought into dialogue with many different concerns.

³⁶ K. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: MPG Books, 2004). This is a recent presentation on Rahner’s theology and philosophy, including a study on the transcendental and the supernatural existential.

revealed in the future. Ordinarily we view time as a physical succession of moments that move forward. Time is always a projection towards the future.

Time is also perceived as a process whereby potentials are exposed, unfolded, realized or denied in a human life. The time of a person's life is revelatory; it gradually exposes the contents of that life as fulfillment or diminishment of potential, as success or failure.³⁷ In this light it becomes quite logical to regard childhood as inaugural time, the time of the beginnings, the psychosomatic embryo that will, provided development proceeds smoothly, "produce" the adult. Being a child is only temporarily and provisionally valuable. It achieves its full value when it passes on to arrive at the adult age.

These remarks about time provide us with a frame within which we can scrutinize our attitudes about children. Time reveals the child as something provisional and subordinate to mature adulthood. But perhaps a clarification on this matter is pertinent. The child as a person is a personal subject, even though "underdeveloped". The child is a whole, a comprehensive biological and psychological system of potentials and limitations, memories and projections. Time is present to the person as a whole; it embraces, gathers together at every moment of that consciousness, that past, present and future. This is as true for the child as it is for the adult.³⁸

2. The Child is a Human Person

As simple as this expression sounds it is a fundamental idea of Christian anthropology. A person is a subject whose life is eternity lived in freedom before the face

³⁷ Rahner made several references to time as a revelatory process. Cfr. the chapter on time and revelation in P. Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

³⁸ Cfr. N. Mitchell, "The Once and Future Child: Towards a Theology of Childhood," *The Living Light* 12:3 (1975): 425.

of God. Eternity is not the “time after time,” it is the abiding freedom of a human person whose life is spirit and transcendence, openness and potential for going beyond self into the depths of God’s mystery.³⁹

Development cannot be understood simply as leaving the past, as a movement toward something else. The past is a constitutive feature of the present and so is the future. Childhood is as much present and future as it is past. As Rahner puts it: “Childhood endures as that which is given and abiding, the time that has been accepted and lived through freely.”⁴⁰ In becoming adults we do not lose our childhood; rather we meet it as part of the future that is always moving toward us. We meet it as a dimension of that future which sends us forward into the mystery of the God who is our future, lovingly and unconditionally. To cite Rahner again, “We only become the children whom we were because we gather up time – and in this our childhood too – into our eternity.”⁴¹

Development, then, has to mean something more than preparation for what’s ahead.⁴² It has to mean, as well, the comprehensive act by which any human person at any stage of the person’s life embraces everything that the person is, was and is becoming. We are fully adults only when we can meet and affirm our childhood as not only past history but also present experience and future becoming, a facet of what we are and hope to become.

³⁹ Cfr. S. Fields, *Being as Symbol: On the Origins and Development of Karl Rahner’s Metaphysics* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2000). Here the author analyzes Rahner’s concepts in a metaphysical perspective.

⁴⁰ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood”. p. 35.

⁴¹ Idem. p. 36.

⁴² As we can see, Rahner refers to development in a philosophical and theological sense, which is different from the psychological and pedagogical perspectives which I will analyze in a subsequent chapter.

Children are significant for the Christian community's life of faith and grace not primarily because they are symbols of innocence, or future active members of the Church, but because they remember us that every Christian believer must be a once and future child. In children, Christians recognize both the origins of life and the future of life; they affirm both what they have been and what they are destined to become; and they discern the power of human past and the move toward a human future in the presence of God.

If we look at childhood and development in this way, we can begin to understand why the Christian community felt it was appropriate to have children participate in the liturgy, and begin their life with the sacraments of initiation. This is even more evident in the Orthodox Christian praxis of having children receive the Eucharist from the moment of Baptism, as part of Christian Initiation.⁴³ That is why they are considered intrinsic part of the Orthodox *liturgical synaxis*: for they have been baptized and chrismated⁴⁴, they share in the *Divine Mysteries* of the Body and Blood of the Lord. The child is already the adult,⁴⁵ “already in possession of that value and those depths which are implied in the name of human persons.”⁴⁶ Introduced into the human environment the child is already in contact with the history of grace and the history of gracelessness (sin, guilt). That history is a personal history. In a real way the child is the “original face” of man and woman: a mystery, a sacrament of what every human being is, was and will be. Our childhood has

⁴³ An interesting article on the Orthodox perspective, reflecting this conception of the child as a full member of the Church, is: C. Tarasar, “Taste and See: Orthodox Children at Worship,” in D. Apostolos-Cappadona, (ed.). *The Sacred Play of Children*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), pp. 43-54. There the author presents this conclusion: “Whether child or adult, we must become like children in spirit, and offer our whole life and whole heart to Christ” (p. 54).

⁴⁴ i.e. the Sacrament of Chrismation or Confirmation, in Roman terms.

⁴⁵ The Orthodox perspective suggests that the paradox of Christian life is that childhood is seen by Christ as a means to the Kingdom, the sign of spiritual maturity. Cfr. Ibid. p. 43.

⁴⁶ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 37.

yet to be disclosed in its full meaning and mystery.⁴⁷ The significance of the child we once were will be fully illumined only when we meet that childhood which comes at the end of our lives.

The child, therefore, is a sacrament of that radical openness to the future precisely because the child reveals not only what we once were, but what we will be. Indeed, one could almost define Christianity itself as the state of childhood, the surrendering openness to God as the absolute future of man, the future that comes forward to meet men in unconditional love and acceptance.⁴⁸

This perception permits us, I believe, to achieve a better grasp of the meaning of childhood for Christian faith and practice. The value of childhood does not consist primarily in being a provisional prelude to mature and adult faith. Rather, the significance of childhood lies in the youngster being embraced and loved as a revelation of our own future.

3. The Value of Childhood

Rahner explains that a person's relationship with God is operative at every stage of human growth and development, childhood being no exception. However, modernity's tendency is to interpret temporal existence in a linear fashion, using biological categories that view life as a sum total of a series of stages.⁴⁹ In this conceptual framework, human beings move through phases in such a way that, when one phase is exhausted, it leads on to the next, and the previous stage's meaning dissolves into it. Childhood and youth simply "prepare" for the greater part of life, the future that lies ahead. When this future

⁴⁷ Nathan Mitchell refers to this reality as childhood as a parable of the presence of God. Cfr. N. Mitchell, "The Parable of Childhood," *Liturgy* 1:3 (1991): 7-12

⁴⁸ Cfr. K. Rahner, "The Question of the Future," *Theological Investigations 12*, p. 189.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of time in modernity, see: L.S. Simpson, *Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

arrives (presumably with maturity), childhood itself disappears. It is really only adult life that counts.⁵⁰

Rahner finds this interpretation of human development as common among Christians of his day. This would explain the Christian tendency to subordinate childhood to adult life. However, Rahner believes that this is only part of the truth about childhood. Far more important for Rahner is that a human being is a subject. One is not just caught up inexorably in time, but at every stage of human existence one is able to grasp oneself as a whole. To be a free human subject means that one can make present to oneself the whole of one's life, past, present, and future. And it is important for Rahner to remember that eternity is not a final stage toward which we advance in time but the enduring validity of human existence lived in freedom. The eternal goal toward which we advance is an expression of the totality of one's life.⁵¹

For Rahner, this way of conceiving the relationship between human existence and eternal life is as appropriate to childhood as it is to any other individual phase of human life.⁵² However, of all the phases of human existence, it is childhood that most suffers from the impression of being merely provisional, existing simply to shape and prepare adult life. Rahner maintains that childhood is not merely a stage in one's past; it is an abiding reality. It endures as "that which is coming to meet us;" an intrinsic element in the single and enduring completeness of our temporal existence considered as a unity: "the eternity of the human person saved and redeemed."⁵³ According to this vision,

⁵⁰ Human development is explained in a lineal manner, and thus childhood is considered a transitory stage. Cfr. W. Van Haaften, *Philosophy of Development: Reconstructing the Foundations of Human Development and Education* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996).

⁵¹ "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," pp. 34-36.

⁵² Cfr. K. Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London: MPG Books, 2004), p. 43.

⁵³ "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," pp. 35.

human beings move toward the eternity of this childhood; we become the children we were as we gather up time into our eternity. Because the decision that eternity requires of us bears upon our life as a whole, we may still have to go on living through our own childhood. Viewed in this way, childhood is something that we never leave behind completely. It continues to exercise an influence on us and remains an open question. Thus, Rahner concludes, “We do not move away from childhood in any definitive sense, but rather move toward the eternity of this childhood, to its definitive and enduring validity in God’s sight.”⁵⁴

By now it should be clear that the experience of childhood in Rahner's thinking is eschatological as well as existential, since it enables us to appreciate the relationship of earthly life to eternal life.⁵⁵ The meaning of childhood is more than a matter of laying foundations for decisions that have eternal significance. Indeed, it is that aspect of our personal history that can only take place in childhood. The grace of childhood is not merely the promise of the grace of adulthood. This is his way of saying that “values of imperishability and eternity are attached to childhood to be discovered anew in the ineffable future which is coming to meet us.”⁵⁶ The ineffable future coming to meet us is nothing less than God’s own Self, already present in our humanity.⁵⁷

For Christians, Rahner writes, the child is a human being from the very beginning of his or her existence. A child does not simply grow gradually into a human being; he or she is a human being. In the unfolding of one's personal history, one simply realizes what

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

⁵⁵ See the study on the consummation of an individual history of freedom (chapter 6) in M. Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 37.

⁵⁷ Cfr. M. Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 169.

one already is. Furthermore, since in Rahner's theology being human implies an absolute immediacy to God, the child is intended to be, right from the start, a partner of God. Seeing the human being already present in the child, Christianity protects the child while it is still in its mother's womb. It has reverence for the child, for the child is a human being.

In Rahner's thinking the state of childhood is considered the beginning of the state of the human condition: "Possessing itself yet exposed to the influence of the world and of history it has still to become all things in the future. What is already present in the child has still to be realized, to become actual in experience."⁵⁸ The connection between this beginning and one's full development is a mystery to which every one of us is subject and over which no one has control. Only when one's final completion is realized does one understand this origin of oneself.

4. Rahner's Understanding of Childhood in Scripture and Tradition

Recognizing that an experience of duality permeates human existence, Rahner argues that Christianity conceives of childhood as having a beginning in two different senses. In the first sense, the child is not a pure beginning, unaffected by what has gone before him or her, but is historically conditioned by the situation into which he or she is born. The human history of guilt and gracelessness that is a factor in every human individual history also affects the child. This is what theology traditionally has called original sin. However, Rahner's view is considerably more optimistic than that of Augustine, the Reformers, or even the Council of Trent, since he recognizes also that although children are born into a history of sin, they are also in their origins

⁵⁸ "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," pp. 38-39.

“encompassed by God’s love through the pledge of that grace, which in God’s will to save all humankind, comes in all cases and to everyone from God in Christ Jesus”.⁵⁹

For Rahner, awareness of the guilt and tragedy that belong to the beginning of human existence comes about through a person’s awareness of the blessedness of grace and the redemption that overcomes this guilt and tragedy. It is precisely this awareness that is brought about by the grace and redemption which a Christian experiences and to which he or she submits.⁶⁰

Another sense of child that Rahner considers is that what is said about children in Scripture presupposes that we already know what a child is. The New Testament assumes our own experience (our contacts with children as well as the experience of our own childhood) in telling us that we must become as children or that we are children of God by grace.⁶¹

According to this, a genuinely Christian experience of childhood is both realistic and idealistic. Paul and Matthew both see the child as being immature and weak.⁶² At the same time, “the little ones” (contrary to the prevailing wisdom of Jesus’ own time) are used to exemplify the attitudes necessary for the reign of God: a lack of false ambition, not seeking dignities or honors; modesty; and a lack of artificiality. Again, the possession of these characteristics does not mean that children are “innocent.” Rather, children are held up as examples because they are open and carefree in relation to God. When Jesus says, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19: 14), he is not glorifying children but is

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 39.

⁶⁰ Cfr. S.J. Duffy, *The Experience of Grace*, in D. Marmion, M.E. Hines, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 43-62.

⁶¹ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 40.

⁶² For Paul, see 1Cor 3:1; 13:11; and 14:28; Gal 4:1-3; Eph 4:14; Heb 5:13. For Matthew, see Mt 11:16ff.

saying he identifies with them. Children are those who know they have nothing on which to base their claim to God's help. They, like Jesus, expect everything from God.

In the last analysis, for Rahner, childhood is a mystery.⁶³ Along with being the origin of the individual, childhood is the beginning of openness to God. Rahner calls this beginning “the future which comes to meet one.”⁶⁴ But it is not until the future is recognized that the beginning which is childhood can be seen in its full significance. This beginning is actually given and “comes to its own realization, as a beginning which is open to the absolute beginning of God who is utter mystery.”⁶⁵ If we are able to preserve this state of being delivered over to the mystery, life becomes for us a state in which our original childhood is preserved forever; a state in which we are open to expect the unexpected, to commit ourselves to the incalculable.⁶⁶

For adults to attain the openness of children (which is what the kingdom of heaven requires), conversion is necessary. Yet, this conversion is only to become what we already are, children. Paradoxically, none of us know what childhood means at the beginning of our lives. It is only at the end of a lifetime of God-given conversion that we will be able to realize that childhood in which we receive the kingdom of God and thus become God's children. As Rahner says, “We only recognize the child at the beginning of life from the child of the future. And in the light of this, once more, we can understand that childhood involves a mystery, the mystery of our whole existence.”⁶⁷

Acts of transcendence, which are typical of the state of childhood, according to Rahner's theological anthropology, are characteristic of the fundamental religious

⁶³ Cfr. N. Mitchell, “The Parable of Childhood,” *Liturgy* 1:3 (1991): p. 12.

⁶⁴ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁶ Cfr. “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” pp. 40, 42-43.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

orientation of the human person. They can be elevated to religious acts, and the ideas through which we apprehend the world can be elevated to the level of prayer. It belongs to the essence of such an act “that it should not come to rest at any other point except that of total self-abandonment to the incomprehensible infinitude of the ineffable mystery.”⁶⁸ Thus, for Rahner, adults who maintain childhood as an elemental factor in their nature and allow it to develop to the fullest and without limitation are truly religious.

In summary, Rahner defines human childhood as a mystery of infinite openness.⁶⁹ Embracing the mature childhood of the adult, that attitude in which we maintain an infinite openness and trust in all circumstances despite the negative experiences of life, is essential for developing an authentic religious existence. But the ability to maintain such an attitude is always a matter of the “self-bestowal of God” or what in theological language is called grace. The adventure of being human, as Rahner describes it, begins with being a child in the biological sense and continues in remaining a child forever, becoming a child to an ever-increasing extent, making one’s childhood of God, real and effective.⁷⁰

5. Implications of Rahner’s Theology of Childhood

Karl Rahner’s theology, particularly his central focus on God’s self-communication in human experience and his concern for a new mystagogy of the mystery of God’s revelation in children, deserves greater recognition from Catholic religious educators and liturgical theologians. An examination of his theology of the child

⁶⁸ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 48.

⁶⁹ This conception of the child as a sacrament of radical openness to the future has been retaken by posterior theologians. See, for example, N. Mitchell. “The Once and Future Child: Towards a Theology of Childhood,” pp. 423-237.

⁷⁰ “Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,” p. 50.

leads me to the following observations and conclusions concerning his contribution to a more coherent Catholic teaching on children.

First, Rahner provides a dual view of childhood: he contributes an important definition of the child as “infinite openness to the infinite”; and he understands childhood as an abiding quality of human existence that, when entered into and embraced, makes us receptive to Jesus’ vision of the realm of God. Already as a child, a human being is a “subject” who enjoys an immediate relationship with God that is actual and not merely potential. As Rahner sees it, childhood is the beginning of human transcendental, and thus constitutes both the quality that enables us to love and to be responsible, and the state of spiritual maturity that characterizes our participation in the interior life of God and makes possible the experience of genuine human community, fundamental for an understanding of Christian worship.

Second, according to Rahner, being a child has value in its own right and is not simply a stage one passes through on the way to becoming an adult. This view stands in sharp contrast to the market anthropology which regards children as commodities or consumers and evaluates their worth according to cost-benefit analyses.⁷¹ The implication of Rahner’s theological anthropology of the child is clear. Children are not objects to be used. Rather, according to the example given by Jesus in the Gospels, they are the paradigm for a new ethos characterized by mutual trust and interdependence.

Third, Rahner’s understanding of childhood as a basic condition or “existential” that remains throughout the whole of one’s life provides a corrective lens to Catholic teaching that focuses so frequently on the incipient stages of human life. The definition of

⁷¹ See T.D. Whitmore, T. Winright, “Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching,” in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p.170.

the child as a full human being from his or her very beginning implies that a child is a “sacred trust” to be nurtured and protected at every stage of his or her existence. Therefore, an important implication, which derives from Rahner’s transcendental notion of enduring childhood, is the promotion of the dignity and welfare of children as an ethical demand that is equal in importance to the protection of fetal life. In particular, the basic openness that characterizes the essence of a child must not be compromised or betrayed by those who have been entrusted with the care of the child. Violations of this trust not only injure the child but, as Rahner points out, can have tragic, long-term effects on the adult: his or her basic sense of openness and trust can be destroyed.

Fourth, while Rahner’s theology has begun to be more widely appreciated by religious educators for breaking through the abstract, defensive, neo-scholastic overemphasis on content to a more “subject-centered” (in the sense of child-centered) catechesis, researchers in the emerging field of children's spirituality are forging a new application of his insights.⁷² They have recognized that the promotion of the child’s natural sense of wonder is vital to the liturgical encounter with the mystery that characterizes both the experience of God, self, and community. Today, this aspect of Rahner’s theology can be an aid to advocate the development of the child’s innate spirituality, to re-envision children’s religious education, and an active and inspired participation in the liturgy, as a new way of seeing in a world that is becoming increasingly devoid of mystery.

Finally, Rahner’s notion of the child as “infinite openness to the infinite” and his concept of childhood as an inherent human disposition offer a profoundly important

⁷² See for example B.J. Miller-McLemore. *Let The Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003); D. Ratcliff, *Children’s Spirituality. Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004).

theological anthropology for a Catholic practical theology on children. Rahner's theological anthropology reminds us not only that our obligation is to nurture the children who are given to us and all that belongs to them as children, but that each one of us, again and again, must become that child we were in the beginning. It invites those of us who are adults to allow our childhood trust, openness, expectation, and willingness to be dependent upon others to be released, as a facet of what we hope to become.

E. Some final considerations

Theology has an important role in addressing this “parable of childhood” and must proclaim to our age the paradox present in the mystery of the child:⁷³ a gift of God's transcendence, a revelation of his kingdom in the smallness of creation and the infinite openness to God's infinite. By exploring Scripture, the tradition and history of the Church, as well as the unarticulated ideas on childhood present in systematic and historical theology, we can discover in children the paradox of coexistence of littleness and greatness, of realism and idealism, of origin and completion, of immanence and transcendence. The child is embodiment of powerlessness but at the same time an expression of the power of the reign of God, an embodiment of the paradox which Christ himself would live to the fullest in his paschal mystery. In this way, we can perhaps begin to understand the paradox behind the words of the Gospel: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me” (Mk 9:37). The child is a privileged bearer of that reality which Christ came to reveal and to realize in the most complete way in his own person.

⁷³ Cfr. N. Mitchell. “The Parable of Childhood,” pp. 7-12.

A practical liturgical theology of childhood, based on this mystery, is an invitation to see children less in temporal terms than in eternal and eschatological ones. This vision is not just important in a defense of children's rights and their inclusion in worship, but it is also important for the entire community.⁷⁴ Childhood is of a mysterious significance because it stands as an aspect of the being of God that matters for who God is. Such an unambivalent notion of childhood's theological significance invites a similarly unambivalent ecclesial praxis. In this praxis, children and adults worship together. Children are formed in faith by a Christian education that invites and equips them to share in the liturgy and practices of the community of faith, rather than constituting them as a separate culture and community from that of the adults. And adults worship, recognizing in childhood this parable that holds in tension the obvious littleness of children with the mysterious presence of Christ in them.

Some years ago, a well known Jewish philosopher, oppressed with many agonizing questions, asked himself about whether he believed in God. And the answer he gave to himself and to others was "I do not know". But in saying this, he added: "That we are children of God, that I do believe."⁷⁵ Perhaps in this anecdote we can understand what is expressed in this parable of childhood awaiting to be presented by today's theologians. The person that has the courage to accept and to preserve the pure spirit of childhood, and to carry that throughout the entire life, that is the person who finds God. He or she who accepts the child that is in his brothers and sisters has touched God. This is a truth which is present in a very real sense in Scripture itself. Many saints have proclaimed this truth in their lives consecrating themselves to living out this encounter of

⁷⁴ Cfr. J.A. Mercer. *Welcoming Children. A Practical Theology of Childhood.*

⁷⁵ The anecdote is remembered by K. Rahner himself in "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," p. 50.

God in children. Systematic theology needs to keep alive the *fides quaerens intellectum* by expressing in its reflection the affirmative formulation hidden in the paradox of the Gospel: “I you become as children you will enter the kingdom of heaven” and “He who receives a child such as this in my name receives me” (Cfr. Mt 18:5).

The synthesis can perhaps be achieved by practical liturgical theology. Such a theology will help the Church rediscover in the presence of children in the liturgical assembly, not only the Mystery of the Infinite, celebrated in the paschal mystery of Christ, but also the mystery of our own infinite openness, revealed to us in the eyes of our children.

III. WHO IS THE CHILD WHO CELEBRATES? PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S SPIRITUALITY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND EDUCATION

Any reflection on the celebration of the liturgy with children, namely to celebrate the faith of the child, centers on fundamental questions: Who is the child who celebrates? In what does a child's faith consist? How does this child understand worship? The point of departure is that we must know and understand children. The ignorance of children's spirituality by religious educators and liturgists hinders the faith of the small members of the community and so, we must consider the contributions of psychology and education and utilize the tools and research of child development in our efforts to arrive at a practical liturgical theology of children.

If one were to pose the question of children's spirituality to a group of social scientists, some would doubt that it is a definable, legitimate area of study. Among those who believe spiritual development is an important domain of inquiry, some would then argue that it only emerges in adolescence.

The reaction would be quite different if the question is posed to pastors and theologians. They might see spiritual development as a religious, not scientific question. And while scientists might argue that not enough has been written to justify this being considered a field of study, theologians would say that they have tradition and Church history at their side.¹

In reality, the question is legitimate for both the social sciences and theologians, as has been demonstrated by many Christian psychologists and educators. But despite the

¹ Cfr. G.R. Peterson, *Minding God: Theology and the Cognitive Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

centrality of spirituality as a force in individual lives and in societies, focused attention on the dynamics of spirituality in children's lives has been rare.² In addition, many academic efforts have tended to be either theological or scientific, with these two ways of learning and framing knowledge rarely intersecting or learning from each other. Given these complex realities, it would seem unrealistic to propose a sole definition that could adequately capture the richness, complexity, and multidimensional nature of childhood.

A. Towards a Definition of Spirituality

Attempts at defining children's spirituality have asserted that the child has an intrinsic human capacity for spirituality, or transcendence of self toward "something greater." This impulse gives rise to such phenomena as seeking meaning and purpose, the pursuit of the sacred, and embedding one's identity within a tradition, community, or stream of thought. Within the Christian community, spiritual development of the child builds on an understanding of a transcendent and immanent God as well as a community of faithful companions on the journey, all of which bring meaning, purpose, and significance.³

Throughout history and across societies, forms of spirituality have become part of human experience, and they have remained a robust force in life for both individuals and societies. The scientific evidence for this capacity emerges from several sources, including the one that suggests that spirituality or religiosity has biological or

² Cfr. M.J. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 247.

³ See J.P. Jung, "L'expérience religieuse des enfants," *La Maison-Dieu* 140 (1979) : pp. 65-84.

physiological roots.⁴ This biologist approach has produced a narrow definition of spirituality that does not take into consideration the complete nature of the child.

Other definitions struggle with the relationship between religion and spirituality, with the religious perspectives definition placing more emphasis on theological themes and language. Though many scholars deal with this issue, K.H. Reich's framework is particularly helpful as a way to sort through the options. He identifies four possibilities for describing the relationship: religion and spirituality as synonymous or fused; one as a subdomain of the other; religion and spirituality as separate domains; and religion and spirituality as distinct but overlapping domains. This final approach seeks to avoid the polarizations between spirituality and religion that undermine the richness of both concepts.⁵

Scholars who focus on spirituality within Christianity may not see the value of definitional assumptions that seek to be more inclusive. However, finding language that includes a wide range of perspectives not only opens up opportunities for cross-tradition dialogue and learning in a pluralistic world, but it also reinforces the understanding of spirituality as being an intrinsic part of humanness. At the same time, people within specific traditions will likely find value in developing complementary definitions that articulate the distinct accents in spirituality within their own beliefs, narratives, and practices.

Attempts to define spirituality closely can end in misrepresenting spirituality's complexity and depth. But remaining open to a growing understanding and to diverse

⁴ Cfr. E.G. D'Aquili, et al., *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁵ Cfr. P.C. Hill, et al., "Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Community, Points of Departure," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 30 (2000): pp. 52-57.

definitions does not excuse scholars from articulating their assumptions. Thus, people examining the current state of the field have drafted overlapping definitions. One grew out of social science perspectives on spiritual development.⁶ The other is grounded in the language and the themes of theological and religious studies. While these definitions may connect and intersect in the end, both are presented here to highlight particular accents and issues within these diverse disciplines.

From the background of religious studies we can present a first outline of a definition: Spirituality is the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and ethical responsibility. It is experienced, formed, shaped, and expressed through a wide range of religious narratives, beliefs, and practices, and is shaped by many forces in society and culture.⁷

The social sciences, for the other part, define spirituality as the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices.⁸

Neither definition is concise or comprising of the whole reality of spirituality. However, each presents evidence of several key assumptions or hypotheses for our spiritual understanding of children as we embark on a liturgical practical theology of children.

⁶Cfr. E.C. Roehlkepartain, et al., *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004).

⁷ Cfr. G.A. Pottebaum, *Exploring the Spirituality of Children* (Loveland: Treehaus, 1998).

⁸ See P.L. Benson, et al., "Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Toward a Field of Inquiry," *Applied Developmental Science* 7: pp. 204-212.

What is meant by spirituality in relation to the child? Sometimes the term spirituality implies the idea of being self-directed and exuberant. Sometimes “spiritual” refers to a mystical awareness of the child that may surprise us. Rebecca Nye, a leading scholar on children’s spirituality, has coined the term *relational consciousness* to describe spirituality.⁹ Based on her interviews with many children, Nye states that the child’s spirituality is an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness relative to other passages for the child that is also inherently relational, as this was often in the context of how the child related to things, especially people including themselves and God.¹⁰ Relational consciousness is built upon three fundamental categories that outline some parameters of children’s spiritual experiences:¹¹

1. *Awareness Sensing* which includes an emphasis upon here and now experience, “tuning” such as the sense of feeling one with nature, concept of “flow” and “focusing” which involves insight that is a “natural knowing;”
2. *Mystery Sensing* that highlights experiences of wonder and awe, as well as use of the imagination; and
3. *Value Sensing*, which includes experiences of delight and despair, a sense of the ultimate goodness of life, and “meaning-making and sensing.”

From a Christian perspective, the emphasis on the whole child, affirmed by most children’s spirituality writers, whether or not they affirm a transcendent spirit realm, is crucial. From the beginning, Jesus “placed a child in the midst” (Mt 18:2) as an example

⁹ Cfr. R.M. Nye, “Relational Consciousness and the Spiritual Lives of Children: Convergence with Children’s Theory of Mind,” in K.H. Reich, et al., *The Case of Religion, vol. 2.: Psychological Studies on Spiritual and Religious Development* (Lengerich: Pabst, 1999), pp. 57-82.

¹⁰ Cfr. Ibid, p. 59.

¹¹ Cfr. Ibid, pp. 62-74.

of what the kingdom was all about. Adult concern should be for the material well-being of the child (Cfr. Jm 1:27), but also a sensitivity to the personhood of the child is crucial (Cfr. Col 3:21).

1. Spiritual Development as a Process

The notion of spiritual development adds an important dimension in the study of children's spirituality. Spiritual development introduces questions about the nature of spiritual change, transformation, and maturation as well as life phases and stages.¹²

It is important to note, however, that the definition from a religious perspective presented before does not include the word "development." To some, this term implies growth from less to more, which might be incongruent with the understanding that spirituality is fully formed in a small child and is too often suppressed, not nurtured, in society. Others note that spirituality is more mystical, relational, and divinely gifted than is suggested by the use of "development," which can imply a sort of inevitability to the process.¹³ Coming to terms with the language to suggest both the reality of process as well as these related issues remains an important area for dialogue and discovery.

The different definitions assert that spiritual development is embedded in relationships and experiences, with family as well as peers and adults in neighborhoods, schools, parishes, and other settings. Thus, spirituality is not only an individual quest but also a communal experience and phenomenon. In addition, the religious studies definition particularly emphasizes the role of narratives, beliefs, and practices in shaping children's spirituality, as well as broader forces in society and culture.

¹² Cfr. G.A. Pottebaum, *Exploring the Spirituality of Children* (Loveland: Treehaus, 1998).

¹³ Cfr. J.P. Jung, "L'expérience religieuse des enfants," pp. 65-84.

Because of its multidimensionality, spirituality does not fit neatly inside any particular domain of social science or theology. Religion and spirituality inherently involve developmental, psychosocial, cognitive, affective, and emotional phenomena, as well as personality.¹⁴ Because of this complexity, no single discipline or research methodology – whether empirical or theoretical, quantitative or qualitative – can by itself, adequately explore this domain of life. A multidisciplinary approach with multiple ways of learning and knowing is essential to shed light on this important and complex area of human life.

Collaborating with other scholars and practitioners in deepening knowledge of spiritual development in childhood is anticipated, as well as strengthening the abilities of families, pastors, and others to nurture children's spirituality more effectively. The challenge is to learn, share, and apply what is learned so that children will be better supported in their spiritual journey. In the process, a key goal is to cultivate the sense of meaning, purpose, significance, and belonging that form part of human development.

2. Contributions to Children's Spiritual Formation

Some have called the twentieth century the century of the child. During this time, there developed a new recognition that childhood and adolescence is a special time of life that should be valued for its own sake and not just as a preparation for adulthood.¹⁵ Especially in the Western world, there was an explosion of toys, games, books, and media produced especially for children. Church groups also instituted a number of programs and ministries for children.

¹⁴ Cfr. P.C. Hill, et al., "Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commuality, Points of Departure," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 30 (2000): pp. 52-57.

¹⁵ This is in the same line as K. Rahner's appreciation of childhood as something with a value in itself and not just in relation to adulthood.

The past century was also marked by the influence of the physical and social sciences in all fields of study. For the first time, psychological analyses were done on a large scale, examining countless variables of human existence and making claims of authority based on scientific evidence. In the early part of the century, childrearing manuals emphasized control and routine. This mode of thinking was supported by behavioral psychologist John Watson. Watson was convinced that the infant and child were malleable, and with proper control and direction, the child's nature could be reformed. In his study on infant and child care, he explained that the ideal child is one who is trained to be totally compliant.¹⁶ Watson went so far as to suggest that there might be better and more scientific means of raising children than by keeping them at home with their parents. Watson suggested treating children as if they were small adults, giving firm and objective directions. He condemned sentimental approaches to childrearing.¹⁷

In 1946, Benjamin Spock published "*The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*," and turned the prevailing wisdom of parenting upside down. In post-war America, parents were in awe of doctors and other child care professionals. Spock assured them that parents were the true experts on their own children. Spock countered that bestowing affection on children would only make them happier and more secure. Instead of adhering to strict dictates on discipline. Spock urged parents to be flexible and see their children as individuals.¹⁸ Spock's book was translated into many languages and was a standard parenting manual for decades. Although books on parenting are not directed toward religious programs that minister to children, parenting expectations in the society at large spilled over into the way Christian education was conducted.

¹⁶ Cfr. J. Watson, *Behaviorism* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

¹⁷ Cr. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁸ B. Spock. *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

In 1969, Jean Piaget¹⁹ presented his research perspective that emphasized an invariant sequence of stages of thinking or cognitive development that included the experience of religion as something central.²⁰ Piaget's research provided helpful insights into the working and the development of the child's mind, as he identified four stages or periods of cognitive development. In each of the stages the child's thinking and logic are qualitatively different.²¹ His reference to children's cognitive development and religion was not entirely new, but before him there was little theoretical basis for the study and no developmental stages.

Previous research tended to emphasize how children thought about religion, but rarely did the research consider their experiences of faith and spirituality.²² In Italy, Maria Montessori, a physician and devout Catholic who worked with developmentally disabled children, designed a distinctive educational approach that placed the child at the center and understood their spiritual development as something of utmost importance.²³ Montessori believed that children had a natural inclination toward learning because of their inquisitive nature and creative spirit. Out of this belief, she sought ways to create a learning environment where children could explore and learn under the guidance of teachers who would facilitate the child's self-discovery. The educational environment

¹⁹ Cfr. J. Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

²⁰ Cfr. C.J. Boyatzis, "Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Development," *Review of Religious Research* 44 (2003): pp. 213-219.

²¹ Piaget labeled the stages as: Sensorimotor or practical intelligence (birth to age 1.5), Preoperational or intuitive intelligence (age 1.5 to 7); Concrete operations or Concrete intellectual operations (age 7 to 11); and Formal operations or Abstract intellectual operations (beginning at age 11). Cfr. J. Piaget, *The Psychology of the Child*.

²² D. Ratcliff, *Children's Spirituality. Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004).

²³ M. Montessori's book is considered one of the landmark books in the history of education. Based on a radical concept of liberty for the pupil and highly formal training of separate sensory, motor, and mental capacities, the system enabled children to learn through self-discovery. Cfr. M. Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2002).

was to be carefully prepared with specially designed learning materials accessible to the children. Child-size furnishings and thoughtfully arranged learning centers would help children learn within a climate of social interaction with others. Montessori's work is directly reflected in some contemporary Christian education approaches such as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, developed by Sofia Cavaletti,²⁴ and in the Young Children and Worship Program by Sonja Stewart and Jerome Berryman.²⁵ In addition, Montessori's emphasis on the prepared environment and her appeal for teachers to be attentive to children's readiness to learn has had a broad influence in Christian education.

Montessori's approach to religious education invites children (and adults) to enter the sacred story as parable and liturgical action in a seriously playful way, and so to learn the art of its appropriate use.²⁶ The work of the child should be played both in a catechetical and worship setting. Both classroom and church are important. The language is clearly laid out and materialized in the educational setting. When religious education is conceived of as a hermeneutic and catechetical process of parables and play, children are given appropriate means to make meaning and find direction in life, then religious education enhances worship and worship enhances religious education. And in fact, religious education becomes faith formation.

Another development in the last decades was the establishment of publishing companies whose sole focus was responding to the need for quality Christian education materials with children's spiritual formation in mind. A number of companies began to produce materials that were marketed across denominational lines.

²⁴ S. Cavaletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2002).

²⁵ S. Stewart., J. Berryman, *Young Children and Worship* (Louisville: Knox Press, 1989).

²⁶ Cfr. S. Cavaletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, p. 31.

3. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

Perhaps one of the major contributions in the field of children's psychology and spirituality was done by Erik Erikson, the German-born developmental psychologist. He invested much of his life in the study of children. His experience with children began as a teacher and continued as a child psychoanalyst, trained by Anna Freud. For years he worked with children using play therapy to help them express what was going on inside them. With anthropologists, Erikson studied the childrearing practices of American Indian tribes and analyzed the impact of those practices on the kinds of persons their children became.²⁷

Although Erikson's perspectives are rooted in psychoanalysis, his analysis differs from that of Freud. He placed more emphasis on the impact of social influences and less on sexual urges as the driving force of development. In Erikson's description of development, the rational ego is more central than the irrational id. He also describes the potential for development across the life span, rather than looking only at childhood and warning of the lasting impact of childhood traumas.²⁸ Erikson saw human development as the process of the body and the ego developing in interaction with the social context. None of these elements can be fully understood in isolation from the others, and all must be considered to comprehend human development. It is the interplay of biology, psychology, and the social that causes development and accounts for its outcome.

²⁷ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985). The book deals with the relationships between childhood training and cultural accomplishment, analyzing the infantile and the mature, the modern and the archaic elements in human motivation. Translated into numerous foreign languages, it has gone on to become a classic in the study of the social significance of childhood.

²⁸ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

Erikson held a holistic view of the person, believing that biological and psychological development could not be separated. He noted that as the body uses physical abilities, such as sucking, and gains control of body functions, the ego develops psychological abilities comparable to the physical ones.²⁹ Bodily pleasure impacts the developing ego, and psychological anxiety always causes tension in the body, which may result in pain and illness. The physical and psychological realms are thus intertwined.

Individuals cannot be fully understood without looking at the social setting in which they develop. The developing person is susceptible to the tensions and concerns in the social environment. Thus, Erikson believed we are influenced by the history of our family and community as well as by present dynamics.³⁰ Experiences of the past affected our parents and their parents before them; those experiences reach across time through who our parents became, and now they touch us. The stories of who we have been as a family and community affect our expectations, perceptions, and responses. When those stories are recounted and celebrated, their influence increases. Because of this, Erikson's theory of human development takes into consideration the complex interplay of physical and psychological development interacting with other persons and their history.³¹ He described development as *psychosocial*, believing that the person and the social could not be split.

²⁹ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Dimensions of a New Identity* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974).

³⁰ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Toys and Reasons: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).

³¹ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.

a) Erikson's Stages of Development

From his study of human beings, Erikson identified eight stages of psychosocial development.³² Erikson did not view persons as static things moved from one stage box to another. When he spoke of the human organism, he had in mind a process rather than a thing. Healthy persons are never static; they are always in process, responding and becoming. They cannot be explained by a stage label, but an understanding of the dynamic processes in which they are involved at each stage can give insight into the person. A stage, then, is a phase of life when the person is dealing with certain challenges, developing new capabilities and a new sense of the self in relationship with others. As the challenges of one stage are resolved, the person moves on to the challenges of the next.

In describing developmental stages, Erikson identified conflicts and crises.³³ Stressful psychological effort is needed to resolve crisis. By describing crises in each stage, Erikson implied that normal development does not proceed smoothly and painlessly. The labels Erikson used present the crisis of each stage in terms of the positive and negative possibilities for resolution. From a mix of positive and negative experiences, each person resolves the crisis of a given stage somewhere along the continuum, from the very positive to the extremely negative. For healthy development the person must process and integrate both negative and positive experiences. Here is a comparative table of the different stages.³⁴

³² I will only explore the characteristics of stages one through four, which deal with childhood.

³³ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*.

³⁴ Chart adapted from Erikson's 1959 *Identity and the Life Cycle*, in. E.H. Erikson. *The Life Cycle Completed*.

Stage (age)	Psychosocial crisis	Significant relations	Psychosocial modalities	Psychosocial virtues
I (0-1) infant	trust vs. mistrust	Mother	to get, to give in return	hope, faith
II (2-3) toddler	autonomy vs. shame and doubt	Parents	to hold on, to let go	will, determination
III (3-6) preschooler	initiative vs. guilt	Family	to go after, to play	purpose, courage
IV (7-12) school-age child	industry vs. inferiority	neighborhood and school	to complete, to make things together	Competence

Now, with the process presented in this table in mind, we turn to an examination of the developmental stages of childhood according to Erikson (stages one through four).

1. Trust versus Mistrust

For most children the first strong relationship is with their mother, and the amount of trust babies develop depends on the quality of the relationship with her. Erikson found that babies developed the greatest trust when mothers combine sensitive care of the baby and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness. The mother who has learned to trust and feels affirmed by a supportive community communicates that trust to her baby in intangible but real ways.³⁵

Learning to fit into the ways of a family and a culture is often frustrating for children. Erikson found, however, that children can endure that frustration best when parents have a reason for the restraints they impose, and that reason is valued by the society to which they belong. The restraint then has meaning.

³⁵ E.H. Erikson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 247.

The faith of parents, Erikson believed, provides important support for the child's emerging sense of trust.³⁶ Faith and a trusting relationship with God give parents a sense of confidence that communicates peace and trust to the baby. Erikson also noted, however, that distorted views of God as a demanding judge or a father whom it is impossible to please may cause parents to be fearful and insecure themselves, or harsh and demanding with their children. Healthy relationships must be mutual. Babies need tender loving care, but parents who give no thought to their own needs may be starting their child on a life of extreme self-centeredness.

Erikson believed that establishing a sense of trust leads to the basic strength of hope.³⁷ Hope, rooted in trust, gives optimism and the energy to seek new ways of coping with difficulty and challenge. The ability to trust is fundamental to health, wholeness, faith, and maturity in all of life. This ability to trust is inseparably bound up with faith, which is reaching out to God in confidence that God will be there and will work for our good. Children will develop a basic trust in themselves, others, and God through living with adults who trust in the same way.

2. Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt

During the second year of life, children master the skill of walking. They begin using words and show an increase in their ability to coordinate various functions such as bodily sensations, actions, and words. These developments prepare two-year-olds to take on the challenge of establishing their autonomy. As children begin to move around and explore, they enjoy this new freedom and discover that autonomy is desirable. Children

³⁶ Cfr.E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, p. 250.

³⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

need to assert and exercise that autonomy and control, but as they do so, they are vulnerable.³⁸

Young children need limits that provide a sense of security and guidance. But those limits must give enough space for free and healthy expressions of autonomy. It is important for children to experience both firmness and tolerance, because this sets the stage for them to understand law and grace.

Children who gain self-control without losing self-esteem develop the ego strength of will. If adults overcontrol them, children never develop self-control and become vulnerable to shame and doubt. Erikson found that the use of shaming to control children does not lead to genuine acceptance of the desired behavior. Instead, shaming stimulates the secret determination to try and get away with things unseen and to do what is needed to save face in the future.

Erikson believed children are assisted in the task of accepting self-restraint when the adult world around them is guided by principles of law and order.³⁹ As children experience this managed autonomy of the important adults in their lives, they have confidence that they, too, will be able to manage their autonomy.

3. Initiative versus Guilt

Erikson noted that around the age of four children master the coordination of their arms and legs. Their mobility and self-control have opened to them a much wider world. To their autonomy they now add initiative. Initiative involves understanding, planning, and attacking a task. It is self-designed and purposeful activity.

³⁸ Cfr. Ibid., p. 252.

³⁹ Cfr. Ibid., p. 253.

In developing a sense of autonomy, children discover what they can do and establish a strong sense of who they are as individuals. Their newly acquired self-control gives them the confidence to experiment with the world around them. They act, observe the consequences, and discover how things work and what brings desired or unpleasant responses from other people.

During this period of life, Erikson believes that the human conscience begins to form. Children accept and internalize the standards of right and wrong that their parents communicate to them. Even when parents are not present, children hear the inner voice, which causes them to observe their actions and guides them toward right responses. If parents do not live guided by conscience, children lose faith in the reality of goodness and come to believe that arbitrary power controls all.

Guilt is the inner voice of conscience telling something was wrong. Guilt can be a safeguard and corrective that triggers remorse and a desire to make things right. As empathy grows, children become aware of times when their actions hurt another, and their guilt can lead them to repair the damage done. Knowing the negative feeling of guilt helps children resist the temptation to violate the inner warning voice of conscience.⁴⁰

Play is also significant to this psychosocial development during early childhood when children are fascinated with adult activities and roles. Erikson believed that play is to children what thinking, planning, and blueprinting are to adults. In play children explore roles, relationships, and consequences; they can try out and compare different options, empowering initiative.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁴¹ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Toys and Reasons: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).

4. *Industry versus Inferiority*

For Erickson, education is the process by which children tackle the crisis of industry versus inferiority.⁴² Through education, adults pass on to the young the wisdom and skills of earlier generations. The school is a central influence in the life of the six- to twelve-year-old; it represents the larger society to children and thus becomes the voice of that society. Whether children expect to find a place in society may be based on whether they succeed or fail at school. What happens there impacts them profoundly.

Children learn to win recognition by producing projects, demonstrating knowledge, or performing skills and are dissatisfied with nonproductive activities. The imagination is harnessed as children begin to learn to read, write, solve math problems, and work cooperatively. Completing projects also has an important social component. Children need to learn the skills of cooperative endeavor, and in doing so they begin to discover how a society works together to provide for the good of all.

Children who are ignored or teased come to believe they are not worthy of special attention, that they are seriously flawed. Their self-esteem and confidence are undermined, and as a result, they may never reach their full potential. The whole society suffers when, because of low self-esteem, a person's gifts are never fully developed and used.⁴³

Adults are responsible for making classrooms and children's programs safe places for all of them. When they begin working with a new group of children, they have to let them know that they want everyone to be safe.

⁴² See E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, p. 258-261.

⁴³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Learning to get recognition for what one can do is part of the process leading to the development. Parents and other adults give children a precious gift when they affirm them for who they are, not just for what they do. Children who successfully navigate the crisis of industry versus inferiority develop the ego strength of competence. Competence is the freedom to use skills and intelligence in completing serious tasks uninhibited by a sense of inferiority.⁴⁴ It leads persons to willingly participate with others in productive work, confident that they can learn and serve the community. A sense of competence provides strength to face the challenges of adolescence into which children then move.

b) Some implications of Erikson's Theory

Erikson believed that leaders in his day sought solutions to the problems of society, but they ignored childhood. They made no connection between the ways in which children were raised and how they functioned as adults. No importance was attributed to the formative processes in childhood when considering causes or solutions for social ills.

Church leaders sometimes suffer from a similar blindness. Although we claim to value children and give importance to their Christian education, reference to their spiritual formation seldom becomes a significant theme in major strategies for the Church.⁴⁵ But pastors leave the care of children to support staff and volunteers without having integrated children's ministries into the big picture.

Many pastors and teachers seek to understand adult spiritual formation in isolation from childhood spiritual formation. But our life stories are all of one piece; the experiences and responses of childhood are the foundation stones of personality and faith.

⁴⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁴⁵ Cfr. Congregation for the Clergy, "Letter on the Eucharist and the Pastoral Care of Children," *L'Osservatore Romano* 1:9 (2005).

Many adult problems in relationships with oneself, others, and God are the result of faulty development in childhood. The adult problems defy solution unless the childhood experiences and their importance are understood and addressed.

The Church needs a new awareness of the importance of children's development. Children are now becoming the persons they will be and are laying the foundations on which to build life and faith. They are being formed through what they experience in their homes, schools, and the faith community. We must not be satisfied with giving them two or three lessons a week in formal Catholic education settings⁴⁶ or in having their silent and inactive presence in the liturgy. Our concern for the formation of children must embrace the family and the school as well as the Church. What can the Church do to help parents and educators provide the experiences needed for positive resolution in each stage of childhood development? What do children need to experience in the life of the Church? Let us look at Erikson's insights on child development and see what they suggest for the Church's ministry with children.

1. Beginning Spiritual Formation

We must notice the words Erikson used to talk about the strengths in human development: trust, hope, will, and purpose.⁴⁷ These words have a theological ring; they also represent concerns of Catholic education.⁴⁸ Human development and spiritual formation are not two separate, unconnected processes. It is true that spiritual development is more than just biological, psychological, and social development. Healthy

⁴⁶ This was the weekly program for Religion classes in the schools visited during the in-service Project.

⁴⁷ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.

⁴⁸ They are echoed in the diocesan educational programs of San Juan and Ponce. Cfr. Superintendencia de Escuelas Católicas de la Arquidiócesis de San Juan, *Proyecto Educativo Católico* (San Juan: Arquidiócesis, 2003); Superintendencia de Escuelas Católicas de la Diócesis de Ponce, *Proyecto Educativo Católico* (Ponce: PUCPR Press, 1997).

psychosocial development is an important part of spiritual formation. That sets the stage for a relationship with God.

Parents should show care for their children and encourage their spiritual formation in union with God's design providing children with experiences that prepare them for faith. The mother who with consistent, patient love cares for her infant, gives that child his or her first experiences of trustable, unconditional love-grace. As she gives the baby reason to trust her, the way is prepared for the child to trust God. When parents give children room to express their autonomy and are patient with their efforts to do new things yet set wise limits, they are preparing their children to understand God's laws and the freedom of will God gives each person. From the ways in which parents and other adults respond to their efforts, successes, and failures, children build their assumptions of how God will respond to them. Foundations for faith are being laid through the everyday interactions of children and adults.⁴⁹

Many parents feel inadequate to nurture their children spiritually; their own faith may be new or dormant, their biblical and theological knowledge limited. But God does not call them to be academic theologians. God calls them to parent lovingly and responsibly and to be on the faith journey themselves. When this is so, they will give children the grace-filled gifts essential to their spiritual formation. Understanding Erikson's insights on healthy development can help parents relate to their children in ways that will lay a good faith foundation.

2. Parental Formation

Erikson discovered that the faith of parents, or their lack of it, impacts children. The parents' ability to trust and their sense of meaning influence the child's sense of trust,

⁴⁹ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), pp. 395-436.

meaning, and worth. Erikson also believed healthy development requires that the family belong to a larger community that helps establish values as it orders life in accordance with those values.⁵⁰ People who care about the spiritual formation of children must be concerned about the spiritual formation of the parents and their finding of a place in the faith community.

The Church is also able to provide community across the generations. When the Church lives as the family of God, friendship with mature Christians whose lives demonstrate integrity is a gift the Church can offer the young.

These are only a few possible responses to Erikson's theory. Let us look again at his description of development. But, in our Church, what are we doing to help children positively resolve the crisis of each stage? The insights of Erikson might give guidance as we evaluate and plan our ministry with children.

***B. Educating Children:
Learning as Identity Formation and Transformation***

Unfortunately, Catholic education can bear little relationship to the picture of learning as part of a developmental identity formation. Instead, much of what passes for education in the Church remains based on an understanding of learning as the process by which an individual mind accumulates and integrates information such that teaching is the provision of information at the developmentally appropriate time for the mind to internalize it.

I will now examine an alternative notion of education and learning more congruent with spiritual developmental studies, which can provide clues in our project of

⁵⁰ Cfr. Ibid., p. 430.

a liturgical practical theology of childhood. This idea will see Catholic education as formation into an alternative identity. This identity is learned through participation in the Church as a “community of praxis”⁵¹ that seeks to walk in the ways of Jesus and organizes its life and practice around the central symbol of the kingdom of God, with its reordering of power and its transforming commitment.

1. Methods and Theories of Learning

In spite of their positive intentions to foster children’s learning in faith, many people of good will who are concerned with the education of children in the Church give little reflective consideration to the question how children learn. They understand their task as that of instilling knowledge about the faith into the minds – and perhaps also the hearts – of children. Learning, in this framework, amounts to “an unproblematic process of absorbing the given.”⁵²

Many methods are available for accomplishing this instillation of knowledge, and congregations today engage in various models and methods to convey to children the perceived object of education, namely the imparted knowledge of God and of the Christian faith conceived in object-like fashion. These methods include:

- exclusively “didactic” approaches focused entirely around content-as-information delivery;
- curricular methods organized around official catechisms or doctrinal priorities;
- activity and experience based approaches with minimal attention to theological content;

⁵¹ Cfr. J.A. Mercer, *Welcoming Children. A Practical Theology of Childhood*.

⁵² J. Lave, E. Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 47.

- “discovery” learning approaches such as those based in Montessori educational theory (e.g., Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Godly Play);
- Lectionary-based models that shape various learning activities around parallel engagement between the texts used in children’s education with those used in the liturgy;
- the “Workshop Rotation Model,” in which children engage the same text or story from the Bible through four or more different media.

Each of these methods of teaching has its merits. Especially those that have incorporated important developmental issues as is the case of Montessori methods. Still, all issue from a similar implicit theory that sees learning as an activity that takes place within the individual mind of a child. In this theory learning is facilitated by some combination of input from a teacher and the teacher’s arrangement of a learning environment that will cooperate with that individual child’s internal cognitive processes.

Two basic notions of how children learn are embedded within this theory. In the first, learning consists in the acquisition of knowledge as data. A second theory of learning often implicit in religious education of children is essentially a socialization theory. In this framework, children are imitators of adult behavior. Learning consists in the acquisition of knowledge understood as simple habit or knowing how, which takes place as children have multiple opportunities to practice what they imitate in the actions of adults, without the need of any conceptual reflection on these actions.⁵³ Educational methods deemed “experiential learning” and “discovery learning” often also fall under this implicit theory of learning as a process of socialization.

⁵³ Cfr. J. Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) similarly comments on both of these theories.

Such theories concerned with how children learn are not always articulated explicitly in educational curricula designed for use both in Catholic schools and Parish children's ministries. However, one major reason behind this gap in explicit theories concerning children's church education lies in the taken-for-granted achievement of facticity enjoyed by Piagetian perspectives of learning. These perspectives in their various popularized forms hold that learning takes place through the individual's development of increasingly complex mental structures for increasingly complex acts of internalization, whether such internalization takes place through vehicles of didactic or experiential modes of transmission. If children learn by internalizing, then educational efforts logically orient around giving them "material" to internalize. With this as a taken-for-granted idea about the nature of knowledge, far too often the question of how children learn remains unasked by many Catholic educators and therefore unanswered and unexamined.

Another theory that has recently enriched Catholic education is Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.⁵⁴ By intentionally engaging a variety of "intelligences" or ways of learning among children, this theory acknowledges that different children have different preferences and "best means" for learning. Some learn best through artistic creation; others through the visual and aural stimulation of film; and some through independent contemplation, etc. Gardner's theory is not a theory of learning *per se*. It does not offer an explanation for how children learn. Rather Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences provides a framework for recognizing that children and adults alike exhibit

⁵⁴ Cfr. H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

diverse kinds of knowing that contribute to different learning styles and to different abilities among people.

2. Defining Learning and Knowledge

Still the question remains: How does learning happen? What is meant by saying that this or any other method of educating children for faith “works”? Is it simply a matter of exposing children to a Bible story, to worship or dogma, and reinforcing the contents frequently enough and through multiple media of sufficient interest to children that they can recall the story and thus are considered to “know” it? Is knowledge something that children acquire from adults who teach? What do “learning” and “knowing” mean in relation to children and Christian faith?

I intend to suggest with these questions that the use of any curricular method in Catholic education neither guarantees nor prohibits learning among children. These methods of education may well teach children, and children may well learn something. But unless we clarify what counts as knowledge, identify what we mean to accomplish with our educational efforts, and think through a developmental understanding of how children learn, the likelihood of a match between educational processes and learning among children seems rather slim.⁵⁵

Educators in the Church continue to attempt to locate the problems of Catholic education in curricular resources. Year after year they replace one resource or model for education with another, without exploring the nature and purpose of Catholic education in their community of faith and its perspective on children’s learning. By so doing, they

⁵⁵ Cfr. G. Taggart, “Nurturing Spirituality: a Rationale for Holistic Education,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 1 (1998): pp. 325-339.

do much for the companies producing curricula or materials but little for the religious education of children.

3. Learning: Making Meaning and Forming Identities

What kind of Catholic education can welcome children into the Church and contribute to their flourishing? I differ from educators who equate learning with the ability of an individual's memory to store and recall information. I use the term *learning* to refer to the process of meaning-making, or how persons –including children – make sense of their worlds in increasingly more adequate and complex ways over time. This activity of meaning-making is central in situating a person's identity. Granted, remembering is an important part of meaning-making, as memory constitutes part of the cognitive skills through which human beings strive to make sense of reality. Memory gives access to story, symbol, emotional associations, and desires. However, that is not all. It is necessary to make sense of the story and to engage the story to make sense of their own worlds. Paulo Freire rightly termed this notion of learning a “banking” model of education. It treats learners as empty receptacles waiting to be filled with informational knowledge that could then be withdrawn at another time like a bank deposit.⁵⁶

With Freire and others concerned about the politics of knowing,⁵⁷ we can assert that learning is much more than “cognitive recall.” Learning is transformation. It concerns understanding and identity, because to learn is to be changed, to take on a new identity, to engage in a process of becoming. Identity, though personal, never takes shape independently of the social and cultural context that provides the resources and materials

⁵⁶ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1987).

⁵⁷ See for example: B. Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

for its construction. Insofar as learning refers to the processes by which persons change, become different, or undergo transformation, learning centrally concerns identity. To learn is to be formed in an identity. Thus, for children in Catholic education, learning is a process of Christian identity formation that takes place through participation in the “community of praxis”, community of faith, of worship, and charity.⁵⁸

Education into this Christian identity is hardly politically neutral, as Freire understood well, for in this kind of education, children learn not simply in order to “have information” in their heads. In this kind of education children learn to constitute (and “be constituted into”) a way of life and an identity as persons participating in the kingdom of God. How do they learn this identity? Catholic education is a process of providing children opportunities for increasingly full participation in and reflection upon Christian praxis, which over time forms them into these peculiar identities as people of faith.

Children learn by participation in communities of praxis. They learn as they move from initially more limited positions of participation to increasingly full levels of participation in community practices.⁵⁹ As they do so, they develop increasing degrees of competency and understanding. The learning process is therefore a community process, embedded in a social setting. Education is the process of being formed into identity as

⁵⁸ Transformation is the final goal of a fundamental practical theology. It follows the dynamics of dialogue in a practice-theory-practice rhythm. Because it is dialogical, the transformative process is mutual. From a Christian theological perspective, God is always finally the agent of transformation. All other agents of transformation (community, minister, leaders) are metaphors of God’s deeper transformative love. Their transformative work always has the form of a dialogue Cfr. D. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 279.

⁵⁹ Cfr. T.H. Groome, *Sharing Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991). Groome’s own understanding of praxis is constitutive of a conative or wisdom pedagogy. For him, educators should engage in an existential, praxis-based educational event.

one who holds membership – full participation – in such a community, an identity that cannot be held in isolation from, but only in relation to, the community.⁶⁰

4. Tensions Between Community and Identity Formation

Let me begin unraveling these ideas about Catholic education and children's learning by first attending to a couple of objections that often surface in relation to the notion that education centrally concerns the formation of identity.

A certain tension will always mark the relationship between individual and communal identity within the experience of identity formation. Certain groups, including children and women, may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation (given their positions and power relations). The negative aspects of identity formation within communities will always be imperfect. The Church faces, therefore, the need for continual critique, to reform communal identity and not only to be formed by it. If a particular Catholic school community practice is not open to transformation and is steeped in problematic understandings of Christian identity, then it probably cannot be, in fact, an adequate and appropriate community of praxis within which to nurture children's Christian identity.

It would be difficult to find a Church community that fully welcomes children, that completely and without contradiction bears God's hospitality to all God's children, and that constitutes its identity and practices fully in relation to God's reign of abundance and justice. Thus the faith identities in which children are formed through participation in any particular church are at best provisional and partial. They stand in need of continual reformulation in light of continual learning and struggle in faith.

⁶⁰ Cfr. D. Rose, M. Castelli, "Education, Spirituality, and the Whole Child: Where Are We Going?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 2 (1998): p. 159.

The framework for understanding children's learning in a "liberation practical theology of childhood"⁶¹ holds that the nature and process of children's learning is social. It happens in interaction with others situated in particular communities and cultural contexts. It involves individual and communal practice in ongoing mutual transformation.

This transformation of the praxis of a community is critical to the ability to renew and keep vital the life of a community.⁶² Obviously, an important aspect of a child's sense of participation in a community relates to the sense that they can shape in some way the various social worlds in which they participate. When children's participation in the Church excludes them from contributing to the transformation of its practices, the Church stagnates.

Our goal is to transform Catholic educational ministries; to move from pedagogical processes shaped by patterns and practices of today's culture of consumerism into a ministry that welcomes children into the alternative identity and practices shared by the community of faith. Achieving this goal requires both strategies and tactics.

5. An Educational Strategy for Welcoming Children and Contributing to Their Flourishing

The perspective on children's learning in relation to Christian faith that I am proposing here differs from didactic classroom instruction alone or socialization devoid

⁶¹ Cfr. J. Pais. *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse..* Pais examines the liberating dimensions of divine and human parent-child relationships, providing insights for educators, parents, and theologians.

⁶² Don Browning presents five dimensions where transformation can take place through strategic practical theology. The first two refer to theological and ethical ideas. Browning suggests their relation with a mixed image: theology is the "outer envelope" and ethics the "inner core" of strategic practical theology. The last three are illumined by the human sciences, though they play a role in ethical reflection as well. For him the transformation of a community will be achieved through a process integrating the different dimensions. Cf. D.S. Browning. *A Fundamental Practical Theology.*

of reflection because it is a view of learning as identity formation in relation to a faith community that understands itself as a community of praxis, situated around its central work of enactment of and struggle for the reign of God. As I have said, such learning is not just an accumulation of skills and information. It is a process of becoming that is at heart the formation of identity. Identity formation involves both the ability to participate competently in the here and now praxis of a community and also to flexibly improvise in new situations and to imagine alternative futures based upon the ways of making sense or meaning deriving from identity in practice.

The following are some strategies toward an educational praxis that welcomes children and contributes to their flourishing in the context of a faith community.

a) Active Participation in the Mission of the Church

A key educational strategy concerns the active participation of children in the mission of the Church. A central purpose of educating children for faith is the formation of identity among learners to enable their full participation in the mission and praxis of the faith community. This identity includes their ability, in turn, to impact and transform the practices of that community. The paradox at work here is that Catholic education, while being about identity, in an important sense is not about the ones being educated at all, but about the world and persons to whom disciples are sent out. The rationale for Catholic education with children is its ability to prepare them to participate in the Church's mission and ministry.

b) Linking Sites and Resources for Learning

A second key strategy in educational practices that welcome children involves

making links between the various resources for learning that exist.⁶³ Our Catholic school communities possess multiple sites of pedagogy. The question then becomes how the various learning contexts within a community interact with each other to support persons to learn and participate fully in the praxis of the community. There is a need to create links between catechesis, liturgy, and Church outreach, so that instead of becoming self-referential, they become mutually reinforcing. Various sites for learning can be linked in the practices of a faith community.

c) Increasing Children's Access

A third key strategy involves increasing children's access to the full range of pastoral practices and to relationships with particular adults who demonstrate their gifts for mentoring into those practices.⁶⁴ Some educators refer to the process by which learning through participation takes place as that of "legitimate peripheral participation."⁶⁵ By the term *peripheral*, they convey the idea that an apprentice to any practice does not start out participating with the same degree of responsibility, intensity, understanding, or skill that we would expect of an experienced member of the community. From their positions of legitimate "peripherality," persons move from this more external status as newcomers to increasingly central positions in relation to the community's praxis and identity, coming to be included and to include themselves as subjects of its present and future. This description reminds me of Church historians' depictions of the catechumenate in the early Church. As learners being instructed in the

⁶³ Cfr. W. Van Haaften, *Philosophy of Development: Reconstructing the Foundations of Human Development and Education* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996).

⁶⁴ Cfr. D. Ratcliff, *Children's Spirituality. Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004).

⁶⁵ Cfr. J. Lave, E. Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

practices of the faith community, they occupied a legitimated yet peripheral position of access to those practices. Participating in worship up to the point of the Eucharist – full participation and full responsibility – was reserved for those whose preparation culminating in Baptism positioned them no longer at the periphery but in the center of the Church’s practices.

d) Honoring Children’s Thoughts and Initiatives

A fourth strategy for educational practices that welcome children involves the honoring of children’s thoughts, ideas, and initiatives in relation to practices of faith. Children are not only shaped by practices in which they participate, they also contribute to the community of praxis, with new insights, ideas, and actions that can encourage the transformation of that praxis and, therefore, of the community.⁶⁶ Those thoughts and initiatives have to be valued by educators and the Church.

As a set of strategies for educational ministries that welcome children, the above brief list is intended to be suggestive rather than comprehensive. Taken together, these strategies underscore the necessity of embracing an alternative perspective on education that critiques rather than takes up the market-driven educational practices and ideologies operating in so many educational settings today.

Catholic educational ministries should contribute to the welcome and flourishing of children in the Church. To realize this vision, the purpose and function of education with children is that of empowering them to participate in the praxis of the community that is formative and constitutive of an alternative identity in the world. That alternative identity is focused around the kingdom of God through the call of all persons to be

⁶⁶ Cfr.G. Taggart, “Nurturing Spirituality: a Rationale for Holistic Education,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 1 (1998): p. 325.

children of God. This is a different purpose than that of providing children with the catechetical information they will need. This purpose operates to promote children's access to the variety of spaces within the life and practice of the community where learning happens, integrating children into the identity and praxis of the faith community.

Teachers and catechists are those persons who promote this purpose and take on the mentoring responsibilities necessary for the formation of children's identities within it, in a particularly intentional way. Educational ministries with children do not remove them from participation in the liturgy and mission of the Church, but rather have their basis in the teachers' participation in the whole life of the Church out of which they are able to mentor children. At certain times they may do so from the perspective of classroom learning, but they also engage in this mentoring across the various locations for learning in the practices of faith that make up Church and school community life.

All members share in the responsibility of educating and nurturing children.⁶⁷ Pastors, from their roles as spiritual and theological leaders in the community of practice, similarly participate as teachers and presbyters in the education of children. As such they have special responsibilities for supporting the organizing and carrying out of the community's corporate faith praxis, offering theological and spiritual resources to the community inclusive of children as it seeks to engage in its practices with faithfulness and integrity. They teach God's hospitality to children through their practices of welcoming children into the Church's ministries. As such, pastors proclaim the Gospel in the homily and in other interpretive activities done with children in mind. They are not "above" involvement with the education of children. In fact, involvement with educating

⁶⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-339.

children is central to their pastoral ministry, as the bringing children to an identity and practice of Christian faith is the heart of the Gospel.⁶⁸

In a liberation or transformational practical theology of childhood, the contextual situating of children's education in relation to the rest of what the Church does as a community of praxis must undergo a fundamental relocation.⁶⁹ From its current positioning as a separate or parallel community of praxis, children's education must be repositioned within the liturgical and sacramental, missional, and care-giving ministries of the Church. Children's education must become a constitutive aspect of all of these ministries, as children learn through their participation in them, along with periods of intentional reflection upon them.⁷⁰

We must reconsider the nature of Christian education with children moving away from the stereotypical rendering of just teaching the Catechism of the Church to children. We must move toward a reframed perspective as the faith community's apprenticing of children in a way of life grounded in the Church's mission to proclaim the reign of God. Then it becomes clear that Catholic education of children depends upon adults who actively and intentionally mentor children in practices of faith, and upon the ability of children to have access to and participate in the community's practices.

C. To Celebrate with Children: A Developmentalist Approach

As we draw a panorama of a liberation-transformational practical theology in children's spirituality and education, we must continue our proposal of a practical

⁶⁸ Cfr. J.L. Schmid, J.L. *Nurturing Your Child's Spirit*. Loveland: Treehaus, 1997.

⁶⁹ For an example, see: P.D. Couture. *Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty*.

⁷⁰ See J. Watson. "Whose Model of Spirituality Should be Used in the Spiritual Development Of School Children?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 1 (2000) 91-101.

liturgical theology of children and search for ways to enable children to celebrate their faith and to initiate them into the celebration of the adult community. We now have to take into consideration all the contributions of developmental psychology and pedagogy, if we want to foster a sound spirituality in our children and work towards their active and conscious participation in the liturgy of the Church.

Erik Erikson, through his stages of psychosocial growth, makes us realize that the person is in a continual search for identity and strives to bring meaning to life in the social situation.⁷¹ Erikson believed in the integrity and responsibility of individuals for their lives. He believed that a person's interaction with culture, history, and society interacted to form an individual's identity.⁷² It is not enough for the liturgist and the presider to only have an acquaintance with this theory, they must be able to apply it.

Liturgy should be an affirmation of the child's God-given identity as well as a place for community and personal transformation.⁷³ It affirms the community's positive stance towards the developing child. The sacraments, when celebrated with knowledge and sensitivity, can become an opportunity for the spiritual development of the child.

Children's liturgists will need to work on an application of the work of child developmentalists such as Erikson. This is a critical issue: that the liturgy be planned for the child as the child actually is; for what he or she thinks, feels, and empathizes. The opposite alternative would be to continue planning and celebrating liturgy based on a fixed philosophy of being rather than one of transformative becoming.

⁷¹ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, pp. 247-274.

⁷² Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*.

⁷³ Cfr. M. Aletti, "Fanciulli e Liturgia: note di psicologia della religione," *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): pp. 615-633.

In a constant state of becoming, children are in the process of moving from one stage of development to another. Consequently, the liturgy team and the presider must know not only where the children are but where they are going. Knowledge of child development provides essential insights. The work of developmentalists should lead to reflection on the questions we ask with regard to the entire spectrum of children's liturgy: from our expectation that children should participate in a community action to the limitations which children bring to liturgy, such as natural levels of interpretation.⁷⁴ There should be reflection on how we allow children to use their bodies in prayer and celebration, and on their limited skills for abstraction and universality.⁷⁵ We should examine penitential rites, selections from Scripture, how we tell the story in the Liturgy of the Word, and the length of the liturgy.

Any acknowledgment that faith is possible for children entails the realization that children need to celebrate their faith.⁷⁶ But it cannot be our adult faith that children celebrate. Children are capable of celebrating at their particular stage of development. If children are to do more than just be physically present, if we want them to have a positive attitude for liturgical celebration, then we must take seriously where they are now. Our task is to nurture their faith, not to create obstacles for its development. As the document *Music in Catholic Worship* reminds us, "Faith grows when it is well expressed in good celebrations. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations weaken and

⁷⁴ See M.F.T. Chater, "Woundedness and the Learning Child-Spirit: Ontology and Epistemology of a Therapeutic Education," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 2 (1998): p. 147.

⁷⁵ Cfr. J. Gallet, "Bodily-based Imagination and the Liturgical Formation of Children," *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (2000): pp. 113-126.

⁷⁶ See P.M. Onest, *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith* (Akron: TheoLogic, 2002).

destroy faith.”⁷⁷

Children’s liturgy should take into consideration the difference between children and adults. This requires an understanding of who children are. There needs to be a definition of children’s liturgy which takes the child as seriously as the Church takes the liturgy. As children move from one stage of development to another, they are as different from each other as they are from adults. To speak of children’s liturgy is to speak not of one but of several different categories. We have children’s liturgies and children’s adaptations. It is as if the adaptors did not know that there were pre-schoolers, elementary school children, and junior high school children. These groups are different from each other.

There is a growing amount of organized research available on the social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual qualities of children at various stages of development. But this data is so many times ignored by those responsible for children’s liturgies.⁷⁸ This research is essential to the development of liturgical principles and celebrations of children’s faith.

1. Children’s Liturgy as Initiation

One of the purposes of children’s liturgy is the initiation of children into the adult community celebration. However, one should keep in mind that the celebration of faith and initiation are not the only purposes of liturgy. However, these two purposes are fundamental and demand consideration and study.

⁷⁷ Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Music in Catholic Worship* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1972).

⁷⁸ Cfr. J. Patano Vos, *Celebrating School Liturgies: Guidelines for Planning*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

Children's liturgy cannot be considered apart from the adult community's celebration.⁷⁹ Any community whose liturgies are genuine celebrations of its faith provides the essential model children require. Many times children boycott parish liturgy not for lack of faith, but out of good taste. A vibrant community of adults will gradually welcome children effectively during the course of their growing years.

The initiation of children into the adult community is the responsibility of the parents, the Catholic school and parish, all the Church as community.⁸⁰ The quality of the life of adult community determines the overall context for all parish liturgies and provides the nourishing experiences needed for the faith development of the parents and catechists. Significantly, it is here that parents experience the sense of sharing ritual and celebration of faith, which are the sustenance they require to be spiritual providers for their children.

By and large, children will learn to ritualize and to celebrate their faith as they have learned to ritualize and celebrate their lives at home and at school. They will be ritual makers in the religious sense to the extent that they have been sensitized to daily interactions and drunk deeply of the important experiences of human loving and sharing, petition, praise, and thanksgiving.⁸¹ This process takes place slowly and imperceptibly through daily exchanges, fostering trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry.⁸²

The great prayer of thanksgiving, the Eucharist, will not only be enriched, but will take on a depth of maturity if the family has rejoiced in each other's presence with hugs,

⁷⁹ See D. Dufresne, J.Y. Quellec, « La liturgie et les enfants : questions and convictions, » *Communauté et Liturgies* 99 (1984): p. 422.

⁸⁰ Cfr. D.B. Batchelder, "Answering the Call of God: Forming Our Children in a Life of Prayer," *Liturgy* 16:4 (2001): pp. 5-41.

⁸¹ Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, pp. 395-409.

⁸² Cfr. E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.

songs, and dances; if thanks are given freely and received in words or gestures; if parent and child have shared meals with laughter; and if the young know the feeling that someone cares. Human identity and experience precedes both understanding and ritualization. The family lives out its identity, offers human experience and provides some explanation: these are the first tastes of ritualization as a community.

The richness of the home experience is primary in the formation of faith.⁸³ The fact that school and church celebrations are weak and anemic may say more about the lack of family celebration than about weak parish leadership. Parents, who have the critical task of raising and developing the family, must bring to the parish a sense of community, sharing, ritual, and celebration of ordinary life. The school and the parish cannot create these things, it can only build upon them.

In many instances, what is needed is simple consciousness-raising. Parents do not need to do new activities with children; rather, they might be helped to comprehend what it is they are already doing. For the most part, religious educators have not attended to parents.⁸⁴ They have failed to provide parents with the help necessary to develop that special liturgical readiness the child requires. The ritual importance of daily events must be noted. There is no need to smother these events with religious language; they need to be appreciated for what they are.

In the process of the child's initiation in faith, the family moves from a central to a secondary position. The community has a new responsibility as the peer group moves to a central position in the child's formation. The catechist and the priest must be ready to provide the environment for worship, especially the Liturgy of the Word, before this

⁸³ See P.M. Onest, *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*.

⁸⁴ Cfr. S. May et al., *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

necessary peer association can occur.⁸⁵ Providing the appropriate liturgy requires knowledge of where the children are in terms of linguistic, cognitive, moral, faith, social, and psychological development.⁸⁶

Many pastors do not feel the need to understand children's spirituality, growth, and development. Sometimes they know how to relate to children, but while this may be true for some, we have to acknowledge that a great number of pastors cannot intuit all there is in Rahner or Erikson.

Liturgists should be prepared to understand the need of having a liturgy truly adapted to the children. Meanwhile, small children should also be provided with celebrations in a catechetical and mystagogical way. Eucharistic celebrations for children should be approached with the utmost respect for and knowledge of children and liturgy.

Liturgists need to be provided with more human experiences and greater understanding of children through a study of developmentalist psychology and liberation education, and the implications of this research on liturgical life.⁸⁷ Religious educators must develop a deeper understanding of liturgical theology and be challenged to new ways of ritualizing with children. Celebrants require better education. And this calls for action from Church leadership too, as we can evidence that there was not as much educational effort and publicity when *The Directory of Masses for Children* was promulgated, as there was when, for example, the directives for reception of Communion in the hand were issued.

⁸⁵ See G.A. Pottebaum, *To Walk with a Child: Homiletics for Children* (Loveland: Treehaus, 1993).

⁸⁶ Cfr. D. Dufresne, J.Y. Quellec, « La liturgie et les enfants : questions and convictions, » pp. 403-422.

⁸⁷ Cfr. D. Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.), *The Sacred Play of Children* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983); M. Aletti, "Fanciulli e Liturgia: note di psicologia della religione," *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): pp. 615-633.

Catechists and religious educators also need the food of good liturgical experiences for their own growth. Often at the local level they are not fed by good liturgies and do not possess good liturgical background. Catechists who are ill-equipped are left to their own devices liturgically so the result is poor liturgy with children.

Catechists continue to stock their libraries with liturgical fun and games books. They believe that when we blow up some balloons and stuff the offertory with gifts we are doing good liturgy. Many times they lack the necessary liturgical skills and knowledge. In return, they receive little or no help, given the complexity of their task, and are forced to do liturgy by default.⁸⁸

On a professional level, there is a need for communication between liturgists and religious educators.⁸⁹ Liturgists complain that religious educators do not understand the liturgy and should ask the liturgist for advice. The religious educators reply with equal humility that the liturgists have little worth hearing because they are so far removed from where the children are.

Serious reflection must be given to what is being done in children's liturgy and to what is being done to and for our children. When we can begin to help them grow in celebration of their faith, we will know that a true liturgical renewal has begun. The lives of our children and the life of our Church tomorrow will be the richer for these efforts.

2. Liturgy, Life and Catechesis

As the catechesis of children is transformed from the "teaching information" model to the liberation-transformational model, modern religious educator will act as

⁸⁸ Cfr. D. Rose, M. Castelli, "Education, Spirituality, and the Whole Child: Where Are We Going?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 2 (1998) 159.

⁸⁹ Cfr. B. Gay, "Fostering Spiritual Development Through the Religious Dimension of Schools: The Report of a Pilot Study in 17 Independent Schools," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 1 (2000): pp. 61-74.

mystagogues who will lead children into the mystery by helping them explore the multilayered ramifications of their experiences of liturgy and life and the intimate connection between the two. Liturgical celebrations become once again the ritual expression of our whole life in Christ, and not didactic exercises.⁹⁰

What is at stake in the matter of children's liturgies is not simply good catechetical method or proper liturgical formation, but the integrity of the Christian assembly itself.⁹¹ For it is the assembly's primary mission to witness to the full breadth and depth of God's gifts to humankind, in the young and the old, the robust and the sick, the joyful and the bereaved, the strong and the weak. It would be sadly ironic indeed if, at this period in our history when we are striving for greater inclusivity in liturgical language and ministerial praxis, we were to exclude those little ones whom Jesus drew to himself and blessed.

Quite significantly, then, the seeds for religious education and liturgical celebration come from two sources: from social science and from revelation. It comes first from biology, from that living process of human development, because each of us must learn, step by step, how to make our way courageously through the journey that leads to maturity. All along the way we are challenged to rethink our identity and self-understanding and to let go of patterns of behavior that we have gradually outgrown. In this psychosocial frame of reference, the transcendent is always in the past. On the other hand, the agenda for religious education and community worship comes from revelation, and this makes its purpose radically different. It is oriented toward the future. God invites

⁹⁰ Cfr. S. May, et al., *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*.

⁹¹ Cfr. D. Dufresne, J.Y. Quellec., « La liturgie et les enfants : questions and convictions, » p. 422.

us to become new beings. The imagery of promise, of love and of fulfillment given in Scripture intersects with the experiences rooted in our history.⁹²

The marvel of our Christian liturgy, of course, is that it binds up both past and future, social science and revelation. It binds our inner needs with the symbols of God's presence and love. If our deepest inner need is a hunger for identity and meaning, this is met in countless ways in ritual signs that have erupted within the Church as a community of faith that walks toward transformation and eschatological fulfillment.⁹³

The child's nostalgia for being lovingly protected by the mother lives on in us. The Church meets that nostalgia with washing, feeding, anointing, embracing, laying on hands, and gestures of reverence like prostrations. These gestures have a symbolic resonance that can touch the depths of our yearning.⁹⁴

The young person's hope to be included, to be loved as precious in the competitive, emotional environment of the family or the schoolroom lives on, too. The Church meets that hope by including children in the corporate action of the Christian liturgy; by encouraging full, active, and conscious participation of children in worship, accommodated to their stage of psychosocial development.⁹⁵

The child's desire to be recognized as unique, to be known as that never-before-appearing presence that is the emerging self, lives on as well. The Church meets that desire by setting one apart for participation in ministry and leadership, cherishing one's gifts, and opening space for new expressions of life. And the children's path to

⁹² Cfr. C. Stonehouse., *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

⁹³ See M.F.T. Chater, "Woundedness and the Learning Child-Spirit: Ontology and Epistemology of a Therapeutic Education," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 2 (1998): p. 147.

⁹⁴ Cfr. the section on the "Homo Religiosus" in E.H. Erikson. *Gandhi's Truth*, pp. 395-436.

⁹⁵ M. Aletti, "Fanciulli e Liturgia: note di psicologia della religione," *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): pp. 615-633.

transformation is liturgically realized in the Eucharistic assembly, as it opens up itself to the mystery of the presence of Christ, in the sharing of the Word, the breaking of the Bread, in thanksgiving to the Father, through the power of the Spirit.

IV. CHILDREN IN THE LITURGICAL ASSEMBLY: THE RITES AND DOCUMENTS ON THE LITURGY WITH CHILDREN

Developments on child psychology, pedagogy, and spirituality, began to have practical consequences in the celebration of the liturgy with children. After the Vatican Council's invitation to adapt the liturgical celebrations to the different cultures and types of assemblies,¹ a process of adaptation of the liturgy for children began to take place. Efforts began to take serious form after the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship (SCDW) published in 1974 the *Directory for Masses with Children* (DMC),² in a joint work of liturgists, educators, catechists, psychologists, and pastors. A year later, that liturgical renewal went even further, with the composition of three *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with children*.³ These anaphoras inaugurated a new panorama for liturgical praxis that continued with the publication of several *Lectionaries for Masses with Children* by the Conferences of Bishops of several countries.⁴

In an effort to arrive at a practical liturgical theology of children, I will now examine the historical background of the participation of children in the liturgical assembly of the Church, followed by the liturgical renewal of children in the liturgy as evidenced in the documents and rites that came to existence after Vatican Council II. An analysis and commentary of the most important aspects of the documents will be offered,

¹ Cfr. SC 37-40.

² SCDW, "Pueros Baptizatos. Directorium de Missis cum pueris," AAS 66 (1974): pp. 30-46. [DOL 276].

³ SCDW, "Preces eucharisticae pro Missis cum pueris," *Notitiae* 11 (1975): pp. 7-12.

⁴ See for example: CEI, *La Messa dei fanciulli* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1976); Conferencia Episcopal Española, *Orientaciones Pastorales del Leccionario para las Misas con niños* (Madrid: Coeditores Litúrgicos, 1984); United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Introduction: Lectionary for Masses with Children* (Washington: USCCB, 1993); P. Freeburg, E. Matthews, C. Walker, et al., *Sunday Lectionary for Children* (Loveland: Treehaus Communications, 1990-1993).

after the initial historical study of the role of children in the liturgy. This analysis of the rites and documents is set in a theological understanding of the place of children in the liturgical assembly, a theology of childhood, and the psychological and pedagogical examination of children's spirituality.

A. Children in the Liturgy: A Historical Examination

Since the early Church, Christians have treated children as full human beings. Infants could be baptized, confirmed and admitted to the Eucharist, just like adults. In the ecclesial communion there was a radical unity and equality in which the normal social distinctions between male and female, slaves and free, even children and adults, simply did not count.

Christian communities took care from the beginning to bring the little ones to Christ through the sacraments of Initiation, and especially through Eucharistic communion, which was administered even to nursing infants.⁵ This, as was prescribed in almost all ancient rituals, was done at Baptism until the thirteenth century, and this custom prevailed in some places even later.⁶ Infants, were not only admitted to the Eucharist at the time of Baptism, but also frequently throughout childhood. In some churches it was custom to have children participate and receive the Eucharist immediately after the clergy; in others, the small fragments which remained after the communion of the adults were given to the children. This practice later died out in the Latin Church, and children participated in the liturgy but did not receive the Eucharist

⁵ Cfr. C. Willis, "Not Without the Children," *Modern Liturgy* 2 (1995) pp. 8-9.

⁶ The custom is followed to this day in the Oriental and Orthodox churches. To remove the danger that infants might eject the consecrated host, the custom obtained from the beginning of administering the Eucharist to children under the species of wine only.

until they had come to the age of reason and had some knowledge of the sacrament, or as became custom in many places, until the age of adolescence.⁷ Pope St. Pius X put an end to practices that had delayed the reception of the Eucharist by children and established that children were to receive the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist as soon as they reached the age of reason.⁸

Since children's participation in the sacraments was a common practice in the early and medieval Church, there is only an indirect and accidental reference to it in the Fathers of the Church and other primary sources.⁹ There is no early historical evidence of the Eucharist just *for* children, but rather a Eucharist *with* children who also celebrate the mystery of Christ. One interesting marginal reference is by St. Augustine. While preaching on 1 Timothy 1:15, against the Pelagians, Augustine remarks:

Those who say that infancy has nothing in it for Jesus to save, are denying that Christ is Jesus for all believing infants. Yes, they're infants, but they are his members. They are infants, but they receive his sacraments. They are infants, but they share in his table, in order to have life in themselves.¹⁰

Augustine shows that the early Church's praxis was inclusive of children. Children were subjects of faith, members of the Church, and shared in the Eucharist.

⁷ This practice, already accepted by local councils, was confirmed by the fourth Council of Lateran, in 1215, which promulgated its canon XXI, whereby Confession and Communion were made obligatory on the faithful after they had attained the use of reason, in these words: "All the faithful of both sexes shall, after reaching the years of discretion, make private confession of all their sins... they shall also devoutly receive the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at least at Easter time..." [See. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), p. 236.] The Council of Trent confirmed the Decree of the Lateran Council, but many exceptions were made throughout the centuries, delaying First Communion until early adolescence, as was the practice until the early twentieth century.

⁸ Cfr. SCDW, "*Quam singulari*. Decreto sulla prima comunione dei fanciulli," AAS 2 (1910)pp. 577-583.

⁹ Cfr. T. Lee, *The History of Paedocommunion from the Early Church Until 1500* (St. Louis: PCA Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, 11 vols. Part III-Sermons, (New York: New City Press, 1992), p. 261.

Children were thus considered part of the Church assembly. They were baptized members of the community, part of the people of God. Even at their young age, they were present at the celebration of the “Divine Mysteries”. Children were not just passive observers, but educated by their parents to respond, pray, sing, and participate in the Eucharistic assembly.

The entire Eucharistic liturgy was thought to be the worship of the entire assembly, not just that of the bishop or priests. In fact, even the anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer, summit of the celebration, was an act of the entire *synaxis*, including the children. St. John Chrysostom teaches the community in that regard:

Even that which concerns the Eucharistic Prayer is common both to the priest and to the people. In fact, the priest does not proclaim the anaphora alone, but with the entire assembly. In fact, only after receiving their consent expressing that it is right to proceed, only then can he begin the anaphora. I mention all these things to exhort everyone, even the children, to be attentive so that we will understand that we are only one body. And because of this we do not leave everything to the priests but participate ourselves, taking care of the whole Church.¹¹

The spiritual understanding of the child as a subject in the liturgy, present in the early Church, also survived in the roles that children exercised in the liturgy throughout the centuries. This is a matter not often discussed in studies of the history of the liturgy, but it is witnessed to indirectly in studies of the history of the Church.¹² The fact is that children did play a role in the liturgy from early centuries to modern times. The participation of children in the liturgy is attested not just by their presence and reception of the sacraments, but also in the liturgical roles played by young boys in monasteries and

¹¹ Hom 18, in II Cor, PG 61.

¹² Mark Searle offers an account of tradition regarding children in the liturgy [“Children in the Assembly of the Church,” in E. Bernstein, J. Brooks-Leonard (eds.), *Children in the Assembly of the Church* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), pp. 30-50.] He bases himself in the studies by M.R. Botterman, *Die Beteiligung des Kindes an der Liturgie von den Anfängen der Kirche bis Heute* (Frankfurt/Bonn: P. Lang, 1982).

churches, and in the roles exercised by young girls, at least in the choir of women's monasteries.¹³

Today's altar servers and boys choirs are vestiges of ancient traditions that accorded liturgical roles to young boys. These practices date from at least the fourth century, when boys were not only entrusted with the ministries of singing and reading in the liturgical assembly, but were actually commissioned for such tasks. Perhaps as early as the fifth century the need to train these children led to the establishment in Rome of various Choir schools attached to Roman basilicas.

The Roman practice of Choir Schools spread, and in several other places these choir children were accommodated as members of the bishop's household and given the tonsure.¹⁴ Later they might be ordained as psalmists or as acolytes. Once these children reached adolescence they could return to lay life or pursue ecclesiastical studies. In medieval Europe this practice continued to flourish, with children being given to the Church to be schooled in the arts and to serve in the liturgy. The main centers for this were the cathedrals and great abbeys.⁷ Children assumed responsibilities as choristers, readers, cross-bearers, thurifers, candle-bearers, and water-bearers. These offices could

¹³ Several historical testimonies can be brought to attention: *The Tradition of Hippolytus* indicates that after the communal supper with its solemn service of light, "they shall rise and pray and the boys and the virgins shall sing psalms"; ed. G. J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote Notts: Grove, 1976), p. 24. The alternation of psalms by boys and virgins is mentioned again in the (IV c.) *Testament of the Lord*, 2:4; ed. Rahmani, p. 167. In the account of her pilgrimage (ca. 386), Egeria recounts that at the end of vespers each evening, the boys sang the Kyries in response to the intercessions; J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 24:5 (London: SPCK, 1971), p. 124. According to the *Testament of the Lord*, 2:11, the whole people responded to the verses of psalms sung by the boys at the "Lighting of the lamps"; ed. Rahmani, p. 135. Other evidence can be found in J. Quasten, "The Development of Boys' Singing in the Christian Liturgy: *Lectores infantuli*," in *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1983), pp. 87-92.

¹⁴ Searle makes reference to the *Schola cantorum lectorumque* (choir-school of lectors and cantors), already in place when Gregory the Great (590—604). Cfr. M. Searle, *Children in the Assembly of the Church*, p. 48.

take up most of the day during the elaborate daily liturgies.

Children have been significantly present in the liturgical assembly from earliest times and have always been entrusted with roles, whether it be that of the fourth-century lector, the twelfth-century chorister or the twentieth-century altar server. The motivations for assigning these roles to children lay in the recognition that children are part of the community.¹⁵ Adults were not in the liturgy for the sake of the children nor the children for sake of the adults, but both were there to play their assigned roles in the liturgy. Thus, while children have played a long and significant role in the assembly of the Church, the tradition shows them in a rather different light than do the practices of many contemporary congregations.¹⁶

B. The Documents on the Liturgy with Children

When the bishops spoke on the liturgical reform at the first Synod of Bishops (1967), many pastors made known the desire that the Mass might be specially adapted for celebrations with children. Not only were requests made for adaptations; some liturgical commissions went ahead on their own and issued regulations for Masses with children. In other instances adaptations were made by priests or catechists.

Pastors were aware of the necessity to make children part of the assembly of the Church. Consistent with this thrust to bring children into the midst of the worshipping assembly, some important documents and rites were approved. The most important was the *Directory for Masses with Children*, followed by the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*, and the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*. The rites and theology

¹⁵ Cfr. J. Aldazábal, "Acoger a los niños en nuestra eucaristía," *Phase* 114 (1979): pp. 495-510.

¹⁶ Cfr. M. Searle, *Children in the Assembly of the Church*, p. 39.

contained in these documents are consistent with that desire to enable children in the assembly, through careful pastoral adaptations and choices, to come to full, conscious, and active participation.¹⁷ They present nothing trivial, childish or generic. They take the rights and duties of baptized children seriously. They value children not because they are potential adults, but because children are already fully human persons, special and unique, gifted with grace and relationship to a God who calls each us by name.¹⁸

I will now present the historical development, contents and commentary of the *Directory*, the *Lectionary*, and *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*, in an attempt to read some of their major contributions.

1. The Directory for Masses with Children

a) History of the Directory for Masses with Children

The first document to be issued regarding the liturgy with children was the *Directory for Masses with Children*. The history of this document is interesting because it is fruit of the liturgical reform of Vatican II, and of the contributions of experts in child psychology, pedagogy, arts, catechesis and liturgical studies.¹⁹

Upon insistence from pastors, liturgists, and catechists from all over the world, a first report regarding the praxis of liturgies with children was prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1971. This report detailed a reality differing from country to country and made suggestions for a genuine adaptation. The report called for a

¹⁷ See J. Gallet, "Documents of Formation: The Directory for Masses with Children and the Lectionary for Masses with Children –Another Look," *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (Summer 2000): p. 147.

¹⁸ Cfr. Rahner, K. "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood".

¹⁹ The best presentation on the history of the DMC can be found in A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy. 1948-1975* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990).

more simple structure in the liturgy, texts adapted to children (including readings, presidential prayers, and anaphoras), and more active participation.

The Church was indeed looking for a kind of Directory for the liturgy with children, one that would suggest concrete ways of adaptation for each country and adapt the traditional participation of children in the liturgy to the modern spiritual, psychological, and pedagogical understanding of children. Because a task like this would involve studying important principles of the history of the liturgy, child psychology, and education, the SCDW formed a commission with members chosen for their specific competencies and as representatives of various regions and educational methods. This was the first time a Roman Curia study group included two women and a majority of members was not connected with the Congregation.²⁰

Some of the basic principles proposed by the report were:

1. Some parts of the Mass can never be omitted but there are others in which greater freedom can be used.

2. If the principle of freedom in choosing texts is accepted, then a Lectionary for Masses with children could be compiled.

3. Some guidelines should be given for Sunday Masses in which the participants are to a great extent children accompanied by adults.

A second meeting in 1972 came to further practical conclusions and several schemas of a Directory were drawn up. The document received an enthusiastic acceptance by the official members of the SCDW. It was then sent for study to the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Clergy, and the Evangelization of

²⁰ Renowned educator Sofia Cavaletti and Sister Marisa Fasciani were members of the committee. The group had members from different liturgical and pedagogical schools. Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 441.

Peoples. Their replies were substantially favorable, but the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith raised several objections.²¹

The Secretariat did not accept the observations made by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and it sent the Pope, along with the Directory, an explanation of the reasons why it thought the proposed Directory should be approved. Pope Paul VI made his own subsequent observations.²² The Secretariat insisted, however, on the need for special Eucharistic Prayers. The Pope finally approved the Directory on November 1, 1973, and authorized the SCDW to compose two or three Eucharistic Prayers for children, for use by the entire Church.

b) Contents of the Directory

The DMC evolved out of the Church's special concern for children. There was growing concern that the circumstances in which children grow are not favorable to their spiritual progress. In addition, sometimes parents barely fulfill the obligations of Christian education which they undertake at the Baptism of their children.²³ And so the fear of spiritual harm to the youth of the Church propelled efforts in the adaptation of the liturgy for children. The document evolved out of a concern for the pastoral care of children and took the form of catechesis focused on the central ritual of our faith in the

²¹ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made the following observations: a) It is not appropriate that a layperson give the homily after the Gospel. A layperson could address the children before Mass. b) The suggestion about using audiovisual aids would bring the Mass down to the level of a school broadcast. c) With regard to the timeliness of new anaphoras: It would be necessary to adhere to the decisions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on whether it is expedient to give the episcopal conferences authority in this area. Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 444.

²² Some had to do with matters of style, others with four specific points: the reasons for thanksgiving that the children were to express after the dialogue of preface; the use of slides; the placing of the penitential act after the homily; and special Eucharistic Prayers. The Pope showed himself opposed on all these points that the schema included. His wishes were basically followed, but the Congregation later insisted on the Eucharistic Prayers. Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 445.

²³ DMC, n. 1.

hopes of accompanying children who are on their way to mature faith and becoming disciples.

The Directory acknowledged the close relationship between liturgy and catechesis. “It is not right to separate such liturgical and Eucharistic formation from the general human and Christian education of children.”²⁴ The document sees liturgy as a source of catechesis²⁵ and acknowledges that even in the case of children the liturgy always exerts its own didactic force.²⁶ The DMC recognizes that liturgical experience serves as the primary source and focus for initial catechesis. DMC sets the framework for catechizing children²⁷ but understanding catechesis as a pastoral activity forming people.

The Directory upholds the primacy of Sunday and the Sunday assembly. Basic to understanding the relationship between liturgy and catechesis is this understanding of the primacy of Sunday. The liturgy is the source of Christian spirituality because Sunday after Sunday “we see what we are and what we want to become, and we are given the chance to say yes to it in our heart of hearts.”²⁸ This is no less true for children than it is for adults. The Directory presents three models for celebrating Masses with children: Masses with adults in which children also participate;²⁹ Sunday Masses in which large numbers of children are present along with adults;³⁰ Masses with children in which only a few adults participate.³¹ The first two models considered are those celebrated

²⁴ Ibid., n. 8.

²⁵ GCD, n. 45.

²⁶ DMC, n. 12.

²⁷ SLF, n. 135.

²⁸ J. Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Ligouri: Triumph Books, 1991), p. 112.

²⁹ See chapter 2 of the DMC.

³⁰ Cfr. Ibid., n. 19.

³¹ See chapter 3 of the DMC.

“especially on Sunday”.³² Although the third model is celebrated “during the week, ...it is always necessary to keep in mind that through these Eucharistic celebrations, children must be led toward the celebration of Masses with adults, especially the Masses in which the Christian community comes together on Sunday.”³³

The Directory is unique in its concern for a specific group of people, namely baptized children “who have not yet entered the period of pre-adolescence.”³⁴ It sends the message that the Church takes its children seriously. The first part of the Directory reminds us of the responsibility of the adult Church, namely the Christian family and the Christian community to the baptized.³⁵ From the earliest times, children have been baptized in the faith of the Church; however, the Church must be concerned that the baptized grow to a mature faith.³⁶ In a sense the document presents a mystagogical catechesis that is dependent on the experience of the rite to foster mature faith.³⁷ The Sacred Mystery is the source and font of catechesis for the baptized. This postbaptismal period of mystagogy is a time for children together with the adult community “to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it a part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist and doing works of charity.”³⁸ Our Baptismal identity is nourished at the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist; therefore, a fully Christian life cannot be conceived without participation in the liturgy.³⁹ The introduction to the Directory suggests that our effort in adapting the liturgy for

³² Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 16.

³³ *Ibid.* nn. 20-21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 6

³⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, nn. 10-11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 8.

³⁷ See NCD, n. 33.

³⁸ Cfr. RCIA, n. 244.

³⁹ Cfr. DMC, n. 8.

children is more pastoral obligation than option. It is necessary to take great care that the children do not feel neglected.

The Directory consists of an introduction and three chapters. The intention is not to give a detailed description of the rites of the Mass, but only to set down basic principles that complement, as it were, the GIRM and adapt it to a particular situation. The purpose is, therefore, to indicate the means and methods of educating children to understand and take a full and conscious part in it so that they will eventually be able to participate in the Eucharistic celebration of the community.⁴⁰ This last is the ultimate end in view. Mass geared to children is not an end in itself but seeks the eventual full participation of children in the entire liturgical assembly. The Directory is aimed at children of catechetical age, those who have not yet reached pre-adolescence, even though in some documents reference is made to “students up to the twelfth grade.”⁴¹

The first chapter deals with the preparation of children for the celebration of the Eucharist. It speaks of the indispensable role of the family, of the Christian community that helps the family in its educational mission, and of catechetical instruction in school and in the parish. It wants the children to gain an understanding, through the rites and prayers of the meaning of the Eucharistic celebration. An important role in the liturgical and Eucharistic training of children belongs to celebrations that introduce them to an understanding of important elements of the Mass, such as the greeting, silence, praise, and thanksgiving.

The second chapter is concerned with Masses for adults in which children also take part. The witness given by adults who live and express their faith fully plays an

⁴⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴¹ This reference to school-aged children is made in the documents pertaining to the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children.

indispensable and primordial role in the formation of children. Therefore, if children at Mass have their parents and other family members at their side, the spirituality of the family will be greatly fostered.⁴² Children are here divided into two categories: those who are still unable to participate in the Mass (these can be kept in an appropriate place apart and brought into the church for the blessing at the end of Mass), and those who are able to take an active part. Some account at least must be taken of their presence by speaking more directly to them in the exhortations and at some point in the homily too.⁴³ Ways should be sought to involve them more directly and assigning them some tasks. At times it can be helpful to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word with them in a separate place and then have them rejoin the community for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.⁴⁴

Chapter Three is the longest and deals more specifically with Masses for children in which adults also take part. Although the Directory is still addressing itself to children, it is no longer dealing with Masses solely for children. The presence of at least some adults has an educational value and is necessary.

Once again, some principles of religious pedagogy are mentioned, dealing especially with education to an understanding of the signs used. The instruction should then turn to the religious application of these values in the celebration of the Eucharist and to the meaning of the gestures and signs used in this celebration.

Precisely because Mass with Children is an educational preparation for Mass with the whole community, the DMC states that it is preferably to be celebrated during the week and not on Sunday. Furthermore, the structure proper to the Mass should be respected, so as not to put an excessive emphasis on the difference between Mass with

⁴² Cfr. DMC, n. 16.

⁴³ Cfr. Ibid., n. 17.

⁴⁴ Cfr. Idem.

children and Mass with the community. Some rites and texts may never be adapted: the acclamations and responses of the faithful, the greetings of the celebrant, the Our Father, the Trinitarian formula of the final blessing.⁴⁵

The children are to be given various active roles: preparation of the Church and the altar, singing and the playing of musical instruments, proclaiming the readings, asking or answering questions during the homily, offering intentions during the prayer of the faithful, and bringing the gifts to the altar. All these activities are ordered in turn to the most important kind of participation, namely, the interior. The DMC therefore offers practical guidelines with regard to the various parts of the celebration, the texts, the singing and music, the gestures, the visual elements, silence, and the various parts of the Mass.⁴⁶

The Directory is concerned less with solutions of concrete cases than with principles and guidelines, exhortations, and motivations. It shows how the reformed liturgy can be wisely and profitably adapted to the real situations of believers, so as to facilitate their joyous, conscious, active and devout participation in the divine mysteries. Then they will grow in faith and proclaim Christ to others.

2. Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children

a) History of the Anaphoras

After the approval of the DMC by Pope Paul VI, the SCDW continued its efforts to work on the composition of new liturgical texts for Masses with children. Even though these efforts encountered opposition from other entities of the Roman Curia, renowned

⁴⁵ Cfr. DMC, nn. 39, 54.

⁴⁶ See the section of the Directory that goes from numbers 29 to 54.

pastors, liturgists, historians, and catechists managed to obtain the official approval of new anaphoras.

There had been many requests for Eucharistic Prayers adapted to the language and mentality of children. After Pope Paul VI granted the SCDW the initial authorization to proceed, the SCDW decided to begin the composition of new Prayers. A special study group was set up.⁴⁷ The texts were prepared in French and German and were then translated into English, Italian, and Spanish. This was the first time official liturgical texts were originally written in native languages instead of the official Latin.⁴⁸

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was vocally opposed to the whole process of composition of new Eucharistic Prayers and presented several objections in the process. The secretary of the SCDW was received in audience by the Pope, to discuss the situation. Paul VI did not show any great enthusiasm for the Eucharistic Prayers for children, but in view of the unanimity of the SCDW he expressed his availability to open doors closed up till then. On October 1974 the Holy Father presented his decision regarding the new EPMC, authorizing the texts for a period of three years;⁴⁹ and signaling the need to determine when the EPMC may be used (namely, when the majority of those present are children or when the Mass is being celebrated specifically for children). Also to be specified was the age group signified by the term “child” (i.e. those

⁴⁷ The group included: B. Fischer, L. Agustoni, Ph. Béguerie, P. Coughlan, A. Haquin, G. Pasqualetti, R. Kaczynski, V. Pedrosa, H. Rennings, D. Rimaud, J. Gélinau, and A. Dumas. For Masses with children: relator: B. Fischer; secretary: R. Kaczynski.

⁴⁸ Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 482. Also see: E. Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite* (New York: Pueblo, 1986), pp. 237-238.

⁴⁹ That is until the end of 1977, but they were not to be published officially or included in the Roman Missal.

who are obliged to attend school, which means in practice to about the end of the twelfth year).⁵⁰

Requests poured in from almost all countries, and the new anaphoras came into experimental use for a period ending, theoretically, in 1977. Together with two additional Eucharistic Prayers for Masses of reconciliation, the English translation of these texts was approved on June 5, 1975, for use in the United States of America. At the end of 1977 the permission was extended to 1980 and then indefinitely.⁵¹ The Spanish translation officially appeared in the Roman Missal following the approval of the “*Texto unificado del Ordinario de la Misa*” for all Spanish-speaking countries.⁵² The new edition of the Roman Missal in its *Editio Typica Tertia*⁵³ also included the EPMC as a supplement, making these anaphoras an official supplement for all subsequent Roman missals.

b) Contents and Commentary

The liturgical reform composed texts that, while respecting the traditional genre of the anaphora and its theological content, follow a simple linguistic style and language, adapted to children. Eucharistic Prayers composed for assemblies where children form a majority of the worshipping community are the fruit of the principle of adaptation, as well as inculturation, taken to its logical conclusion. Because of their importance I will present some notes on the history of those Prayers and some important characteristics of the

⁵⁰ Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 482.

⁵¹ See Notitiae 13 (1977): pp. 555-56; 17 (1981): p. 23.

⁵² *Missal Romano: texto unificado en lengua española del Ordinario de la misa* (Madrid: Coeditores Litúrgicos, 1989).

⁵³ *Missale Romanum Editio Typica Tertia: Ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum Ioannis Pauli PP. II cura recognitum* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002).

EPMC.⁵⁴

The new texts were to be accommodated to the pastoral, pedagogical and liturgical demands of children. This is evidence of a process of not just dynamic equivalence, but of creative assimilation of the linguistic patterns, religious figures, and values in contemporary children's expressions.⁵⁵

Another important aspect regarding the EPMC is the inclusion of modifications in the traditional style of the Eucharistic Prayer, so as to favor the children's comprehension and participation. The principal modification was the addition of a good number of acclamations "to render the Eucharistic Prayers more alive and profound" but maintaining the presidential style of the Prayer.⁵⁶ These acclamations are primarily meant to be sung by the children. They are also meant to involve children more fully in the Eucharistic Prayer and allow them to share in the "mysteries of faith".

The Trinitarian theology of the Eucharistic Prayers for children is very simple, consisting almost exclusively in a description and elucidation of salvation economy. The Son has been sent;⁵⁷ we encounter him, therefore, as the one who comes to save us.⁵⁸ In the first of the three Eucharistic Prayers, salvation is described as a journey: the Son leads

⁵⁴ There are several studies on the EPMC. See: M. Filippi, "Le nuove preghiere eucaristiche per le messe con i fanciulli," *Catechesi* 46 (1977): pp. 42-52; E. Mazza, "Le preghiere eucaristiche per le messe con i fanciulli: Un caso di creatività liturgica," *Rivista Liturgica* 19 (1982): pp. 633-657; J.B. Ryan, "Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children," in F.C. Senn, *New Eucharistic Prayers* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987); D. Sartore, "Preghiere Eucaristiche per le Messe con i fanciulli". *Rivista Liturgica* 65 (1978): pp. 241-248.

⁵⁵ Cfr. C.V. Johnson, "The Children's Eucharistic Prayers: A Model of Liturgical Inculturation," *Worship* 75-3 (May 2001): pp. 209-227.

⁵⁶ Praenotanda, "Preces eucaristicae pro Missis cum pueris," *Notitiae* 11 (1975): pp. 7-12. (n. 7).

⁵⁷ I EPMC: "You sent us your beloved Son to save us". II EPMC: "Jesus, whom you sent..." and "give us your Son Jesus".

⁵⁸ II EPMC: "He came to show us... He came to remove from human hearts..." III EPMC: "In his goodness he came into the world." At a later point, the coming of the Son takes eschatological form: "At the end he will come in glory".

us to the Father.⁵⁹ This Prayer has a three-fold Sanctus, which finishes with the Hosanna each time it is sung.

Creation is hardly mentioned in Prayer II, while on the other hand, Prayer I has an emphasis in the work of creation. The work of God commemorated here is neither the creation nor redemption, but the divine attitude behind both, namely, God's love for human beings. Prayer II has plenty of acclamations, but these can be omitted if necessary.

The theme that determines the entire text of the third anaphora is God's plan for human beings. It is specified as the formal object of thanksgiving. The divine plan is set forth in a very rich and carefully worked out way. Prayer III has been composed to give accent to the different liturgical seasons. Thus, it has variable parts according to the liturgical time. After the institution narrative, there is an acclamation which is repeated three times throughout the final part of the anaphora.

These Prayers represent a change in the way the SCDW approved liturgical texts. Between the two extremes of either simply translating an official Latin text or creatively improvising a text, in the case of the EPMC, the Church allowed the "free creation of a text based on a given model."⁶⁰ The basic "Latin text" offered to the Conferences of Bishops for writing the vernacular language texts of the EPMC was a "model not intended for liturgical usage."⁶¹ That "textus propositivus" was to be a model whose substance and general form should be followed in the composition of the new texts. Since the Latin language does not possess a special style for speaking with children, this original text could only hope to indicate the basic simplicity of structure and tone. In

⁵⁹ I EPMC: "He leads us to you." II EPMC: "So that he may lead us to you"; "the sacrifice that draws us to you".

⁶⁰ E. Mazza, "Le preghiere eucharistiche per le messe con i fanciulli: Un caso di creatività liturgica," p. 637.

⁶¹ Praenotanda, "Preces eucharisticae pro Missis cum pueris," n. 11.

translation, the spirit of each language would determine the specific adaptations to be made. It was not intended for translation, but rather to provide the inspiration for the composition of the EPMC, a task delegated not just to liturgists, but to experts in education, catechesis, literature and music as well.⁶²

The composition of the EPMC, followed the way prepared by the Consilium's Instruction *Comme le prévoit*:

Texts translated from another language are clearly not sufficient for the celebration of a fully renewed liturgy. The creation of new texts will be necessary. But translation of texts transmitted through the tradition of the Church is the best school and discipline for the creation of new texts, so that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already in existence.⁶³

The introduction of the EPMC opened a path still to be discovered. Liturgical texts have to come into being directly in the living language themselves, where account is taken of the need to adapt the liturgy and incarnate it in the cultures and diverse situations of the local churches.⁶⁴ These anaphoras, criticized by some saying they are without value from the standpoint of the careful construction proper to liturgical texts,⁶⁵ have nevertheless introduced a new situation from the juridical standpoint and in regard to modern liturgical methods. "Creativity based on tradition" if adopted for the most important part of the liturgy must itself become an accepted practice in other parts of the celebration. To this day, unfortunately, this model inaugurated with the EPMC has not had more profound ramifications for other aspects of the liturgy. Perhaps this has been in part due to fears of an indiscriminate creativity that sprung up in some liturgical circles,

⁶² Ibid., n. 10.

⁶³ Consilium, Instruction *Comme le prévoit*, January 25, 1969, n. 43. [DOL 291].

⁶⁴ Cfr. C.V. Johnson, C.V. "The Children's Eucharistic Prayers: A Model of Liturgical Inculturation," pp. 209-227.

⁶⁵ Cf. E. Mazza, "Le preghiere eucharistiche per le messe con i fanciulli: Un caso di creatività liturgica," p. 633.

disconnecting it from tradition. But anyhow, the anaphoras for Masses with children are an example of creativity within tradition.⁶⁶

How do the Eucharistic Prayers for children fit into this tradition? What points do they supply for catechesis? What is the manner of celebration called for by the texts? I will now present some observations on the contents of the EPMC, before studying each single anaphora.

The most striking feature of the Prayers is the increased number of acclamations. An acclamation is an outburst of assent or affirmation. It is usually joyful, and the nature of it demands singing. The Prayers themselves do not offer any music for these frequent statements of assent. Therefore, it is imperative that existent music be freely used and simple musical settings be quickly developed so that the acclamations can be employed to full advantage. In most cases, the texts provide a cue line leading into the acclamation, e.g. in Prayer II, “With Jesus we sing your praise.” The celebrant will have to emphasize these phrases, either by tone of voice or by singing. Unfortunately, the Prayers do not consistently indicate a lead-in to the acclamations. Prayer II, for instance, contains some acclamations that are not introduced by a cue line.

The introduction to the texts describes each of the Prayers in general terms, pointing out what seems to be the main feature. Prayer I is characterized by a great simplicity. It strives to promote familiarity with the Sanctus acclamation by dividing it into parts and by using the individual strophes to break up the body of its lengthy preface. Prayer II affords more opportunity for participation by including an increased number of acclamations. Prayer III allows for seasonal inserts at three points in the text.

⁶⁶ Cf. E. Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite* (New York: Pueblo, 1986), p. 238.

In all three Prayers, the words of Jesus in the institution narrative are the same as in the adult Eucharistic Prayers. However, before the command "Do this in memory of me," a phrase has been inserted; "then he said to them." The purpose of this innovation, taken from the Ambrosian rite, is to emphasize more fully the theology contained in the anamnesis, and in fact, the separating of the command from the words over the cup establishes a closer link between command and anamnesis.⁶⁷

Immediately after the genuflection, the celebrant continues with the anamnesis, at the end of which comes the (memorial) acclamation. The purpose of this rearrangement is to enable children to distinguish more clearly what is said over the bread and wine and what refers to the continuation of the celebration. In addition, this postponement of the acclamation makes obvious the connections between the Lord's command and the memorial (anamnesis) pronounced by the priest.

Both Prayer II and Prayer III do not have a memorial acclamation as such. In its place, these Prayers use an acclamation of praise ("We praise you, we bless you, we thank you" or "Glory to God in the highest") whose purpose is to highlight the nature of the Eucharistic Prayer as one of praise and thanksgiving. The celebrant may further emphasize these characteristics by adding special reasons for giving thanks, tailored to the occasion, before the initial dialogue of the preface. This practice has already been encouraged by the DMC.⁶⁸

An examination of the texts shows how the elements of a Eucharistic Prayer are arranged in these compositions. It also makes apparent what is candidly acknowledged in

⁶⁷ Cfr. E. Mazza, "Le preghiere eucharistiche per le messe con i fanciulli: Un caso di creatività liturgica," p. 650.

⁶⁸ Cfr. n. 22.

the “Introduction” to the Prayers: these Prayers contain “all the elements of a Eucharistic Prayer with some very infrequent exceptions.”⁶⁹

Eucharistic Prayer I

Prayer I begins with a preface of fifty lines, broken in three places by acclamations based on the Sanctus of adult Eucharistic Prayers. The purpose of this arrangement, as the “Introduction” explains, is “to accustom children more easily to the Sanctus.”⁷⁰ After the opening dialogue, the body of the preface begins with a statement of purpose to give thanks and praise and presents a number of motives for that: beauty and happiness, daylight, earth and its peoples, and life itself which is God’s gift. With daylight is paired a reference to God’s “word which lights up our minds.” The mention of revelation sits strangely in the midst of this listing of natural gifts. The first part of the preface ends with a summary, that God loves us, which forms a natural cue for the strophe of the Sanctus acclamation.

The preface continues by citing Jesus as gift of the Father, supreme proof that God does love us and does not forget us. The Son is described in concrete images inspired by the Gospel: he cured the sick, cared for the poor, wept with the sad, forgave sinners, and loved everyone. A final image engages the assembly present, “He took children in his arms and blessed them,” leading into an acclamation which embodies the second strophe of the Sanctus, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The third section of the preface represents an exception to the usual structure of a Eucharistic Prayer. Here, to the union of our praise with the heavenly liturgy, is coupled a mention of unity with the whole Church, with the Pope, and with the local bishop. Unity

⁶⁹ SCDW. “Preces eucharisticae pro Missis cum pueris,” cfr. n. 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., cfr. n. 23.

with the Church is more usually cited as part of the intercessions in the other Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman missal. Because of its explicit use here in the preface, its later citation in this Prayer is an attenuated one: “Remember Christians everywhere.” A familiar cue line, “Now we join (with the saints) and with the angels to adore you as we sing,” closes the preface and introduces the full Sanctus acclamation.

The numerous acclamations affecting the structure of the text are meant to involve the children more fully in the Eucharistic mystery. The result is a completely new anaphoric structure that cannot be compared with any other. At least in this instance, the Antiochene structure characteristic of the Roman anaphoras disappears.⁷¹

After a brief transition paragraph, the epiclesis invokes the Spirit upon the gifts. The institution narratives are the same as in the adult Eucharistic Prayers, with the exception mentioned earlier: the insertion of “then he said to them” before the command, and the postponement of the memorial acclamation. The celebrant continues with the anamnesis, the memorial of the Paschal mystery and the offering of “the bread that gives us life and the cup that saves us.” It is only at this point that the celebrant issues the invitation, “Let us proclaim our faith.” With this arrangement, the memorial acclamation stands out more strongly as a proclamation of faith in the Paschal mystery, rather than merely in the mystery of the bread and wine transformed.

The second part of the epiclesis is a very simple prayer for the “fruits of communion.” The intercessions follow, but their point is blunted somewhat since communion with the whole Church has been shifted to the preface. Among the intercessions is a remembrance for “everyone who is suffering from pain or sorrow.” As

⁷¹ Cfr. E. Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, p. 242.

the DMC had already indicated,⁷² the text of the doxology is taken from the adult Eucharistic Prayers.

This first EPMC is a short and simple text, outstanding for its use of concrete images. Its acclamatory emphasis is on the Sanctus. Unfortunately, because that acclamation is interwoven with a lengthy preface, the Prayer may seem disproportionate; of the hundred lines of text, close to half are devoted to the preface and its acclamations.

Eucharistic Prayer II

Prayer II is constructed for more participation through acclamations. There are twelve acclamations in the course of the prayer, an average of one for every seven lines of presidential text. The preface is divided into four sections, each marked by an acclamation. The arrangement is similar to Prayer I, but the preface text is much shorter here. The first three sections present motives for thanks and praise (you love us, you give us this world, you sent us Jesus). The phrase, “With Jesus we sing your praise” signals the acclamation. Two possibilities are suggested, “Glory to God in the highest” or “Hosanna in the highest.” The fourth section of the preface is a summary that leads into the use of the full text of the Sanctus.

The Prayer continues with an interesting embolism, an extended consideration of the last strophe of the Sanctus, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” The emphasis is on Jesus, “Blessed by Jesus whom you sent,” but the remembrance of his deeds is not stated so concretely as in Prayer I. Here the terms are more abstract and theological. The embolism concludes with a mention of the Spirit and his work in our midst. The acclamation inserted at this point functions as an inclusion device, rounding

⁷² Cfr. n. 39.

off this “blessing” of Jesus: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Unfortunately, it is not preceded by a cue line.

A brief invocation of the Spirit, “to change these gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus,” leads naturally into the institution narratives. The Prayer introduces an Eastern flavor into this section. As the priest shows the consecrated Bread to the assembly, the children sing, “Jesus has given his life for us.” The pattern is repeated as the Cup is shown. The “Introduction” directs that these “acclamations which are inserted after the words of the Lord recited over the bread and wine must be considered and sung as a common mediation on the Eucharistic mystery.”⁷³ In place of a memorial acclamation, Prayer II offers an acclamation of praise, “We praise you, we bless you, we thank you,” which is repeated four times, without cues: after the anamnesis, after the second part of the epiclesis, after the intercessions, and after a prayer for eschatological fulfillment. The intercessions contain a remembrance for “all those we do not love as who do not love as we should.” Immediately after the fourth repetition of the acclamation of praise, the celebrant sings the doxology.

Prayer II obviously lives up to its description and purpose, to provide more opportunities for participation through acclamations. A fourth part of the text is acclamatory material. A unique feature adopted from the Eastern rites is the acclamation inserted after the words over the bread and over the wine.⁷⁴ The Prayer has a very distinct emphasis, underlined by the extended “blessing” of Jesus that comes between the preface and the first invocation epiclesis.

⁷³ N. 24.

⁷⁴ Cfr. M. Filippi, “Le nuove preghiere eucaristiche per le messe con i fanciulli,” p. 42.

Eucharistic Prayer III

Prayer III has a close, structural resemblance to the adult texts with which we are already familiar. It includes the option of seasonal inserts which may be substituted at three points (preface, transition after the preface, intercessions). The Spanish text supplies a set of these inserts for the different liturgical times, while the English version only offers inserts for the Easter season.⁷⁵ The preface of this third Prayer is not very soteriological in the motives it offers for thanks and praise:⁷⁶ God has given us each other, this making friendship and sharing possible, therefore we thank him. The insert that replaces these motives in Easter time is much stronger, for it focuses on the resurrection of Jesus and the pledge of eternal life that is given to us. After the Sanctus acclamation the Prayer continues with a “thanks” for Jesus whose work is identified in gnoseological terms: he “opened our eyes and our hearts to understand that we are brothers and sisters and that you are father of us all.”

A defect of this Prayer is the lack of an explicit epiclesis; the Father is asked to make the gifts holy, but the Holy Spirit is not invoked. Like the second Eucharistic Prayer for children, Prayer III does not have a memorial acclamation. The celebrant’s anamnesis occurs in three parts. The first part mentions the death and resurrection of Jesus (twice); the second speaks of the Lord’s present state (living in glory and present in the Church); the third refers to his coming again in glory. Each of these sections is to be confirmed with the suggested acclamation, “Glory to God in the highest.” Both the prayer

⁷⁵ The latin “textus propositivus” provided only inserts for the Easter season. Several Conferences of Bishops added inserts for Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Ordinary time, the exception being the text prepared by ICEL.

⁷⁶ Cfr. D. Sartore, “Preghiere Eucaristiche per le Messe con i fanciulli,” p. 244.

for the “fruits of communion” and the intercessions are very brief. Once again, the doxology follows the text of the adult Eucharistic Prayers.

Prayer III is perhaps the weakest of the three, both theologically and liturgically, but the seasonal inserts offer the opportunity to correct weaknesses at those points of substitution.⁷⁷ An important critique is on the omission of the Spirit in the epiclesis. The extended anamnesis with its acclamations can be a source of variety and a foundation for instruction in the meaning of the Paschal mystery and its “memorial.”⁷⁸

3. The Lectionary for Masses with Children

The third important moment in the reform of the liturgy with children came with the publication of several Lectionaries for Masses with Children in different countries. The publication in 1993 of such a lectionary for the United States came thirty years after the promulgation of *SC*, which called for a “full, conscious, active participation in liturgical celebrations” and recognized that liturgical catechesis is essential in order to achieve such participation.⁷⁹

The *Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery* (1967) outlined the elements of a Eucharistic catechesis for children, so important in the study of the LMC:

Those who take care of the religious instruction of children... should be careful ... to give catechesis on the Mass the importance it deserves. This catechesis, suited to the children’s age and capacities, should, by means of the main rites and prayers of the Mass, aim at conveying us meaning, including what relates to taking part in the Church’s life. All these things should be kept in mind in the special situation of preparing children for first communion, so that it will be very clear to them that this communion is their complete incorporation into the Body of Christ.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Cfr. L. Guglielmoni, “Le preci eucaristiche per la messa dei fanciulli. Spunti di riflessione e suggerimenti per la loro utilizzazione,” *Catechesi* 49 (1980): p. 61.

⁷⁸ Cfr. J.B. Ryan, “Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children.”

⁷⁹ Cfr. *SC*, n. 14.

⁸⁰ DOL 1243.

Both the Instruction and the DMC promote liturgical catechesis and indicate that rites and prayers of the celebration are the means of such a catechesis.

The publication of the LMC gives a new impetus to the conciliar directive that Scripture be given a place “of greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy,” and it is also another attempt on the part of Church to affirm that children are important in a world where they are often abused, abandoned, and live in circumstances that cordon off entry into the life of God. The LMC is not an end in itself but a means of enabling children to participate in liturgical celebrations “in which the faithful, *gathered into a single assembly*, celebrate the Paschal mystery.”⁸¹

a) History of the Lectionary for Masses with Children

In response to the call of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, that attention be paid to “the age and condition” of those who participate in the liturgy and to their corresponding need for liturgical instruction,⁸² the SCDW initiated a consultation of the world’s Bishops in 1971, seeking ideas and direction on the question of the celebration of Masses with children. The DMC encouraged Conferences of Bishops to establish lectionaries for Mass specifically for use with children at the Liturgy of the Word.⁸³

The most immediate impetus for the preparation of a lectionary for children arose out of the DMC. The Directory recommends that conferences of bishops see to the composition of lectionaries for Masses with children.⁸⁴

As an interim measure in 1974, the United States Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy approved a temporary selection of readings for Masses with children with the

⁸¹ Cfr. DMC, n. 8.

⁸² See SC, n. 19.

⁸³ Cfr. n. 43.

⁸⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 43.

understanding that in the near future an official lectionary be prepared. In July 1985, the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy (BCL) began to implement the project of an English Lectionary for Masses with Children.⁸⁵

A committee of liturgists and catechists was established to develop a lectionary and to prepare an introductory catechesis and notes on the readings. In 1987 the task group completed a list of readings for inclusion in the proposed lectionary and requested that outside consultants review the selection of readings. The task group also recommended that the Contemporary English Version (CEV) of the American Bible Society be chosen as the translation to be used in the Lectionary.⁸⁶ This text is not an adaptation of any existing text but is a fresh translation from the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures specifically for children. While remaining faithful to the original texts, it attempts to accurately represent the meaning of the biblical text at a level most appropriate for early youth.⁸⁷

In addition to the use of a translation developed specifically for children who had not yet reached the age of preadolescence, the Lectionary was characterized by extensive alterations in the *cursus* of the scriptural readings.⁸⁸ An original introduction described the circumstances for the use of the Lectionary and provided helpful suggestions for those preparing for Masses with pre-adolescents.

⁸⁵ A. Tos, ed., *Lectionary for Children's Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1974).

⁸⁶ For a discussion of the Contemporary English Version translation, see B. Newman, "The Contemporary English Version: Some Whys and Wherefores," *Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions Newsletter* 19 (1992): p. 7.

⁸⁷ The simplified lectionary is also useful for people for whom English is a second language or people who have never read the Bible.

⁸⁸ Cfr. K. Dooley, *To Listen and Tell. Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1993).

The *Lectionary for Masses with Children* was approved by the BCL in June, 1991. Following the granting of the imprimatur to the CEV of the Bible by the administrative Committee on September 11, 1991, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) approved the LMC on November 13, 1991.

On May 27, 1992, Archbishop Antonio Maria Javierre Ortas, Pro-Prefect of the SCDW, granted permission for experimental use of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*,⁸⁹ requesting a full report on the experiment be delivered to the Congregation at the end of three-year period for definitive action by the Holy See. A date for effective use of the LMC by dioceses in the United States of America was set for November 28, 1993.

On March 24, 2000, the SCDW further extended the permission for use of the LMC, pending the completion of a requested evaluation. Following an intensive study of the Lectionary in the following months, the Latin members of the NCCB passed a motion on November 13, 2000 endorsing “the concept of a *Lectionary for Masses with Children*” and resolving “to complete a revision of the present liturgical book, including a response to the concerns of the Holy See, within a period of two years.” The results of this vote, along with the intention of the Committee on the Liturgy to embark on a complete revision of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* were subsequently conveyed to the Holy See by the Conference President in the course of his regular meetings with the dicasteries of the Holy See.

On March 30, 2001, Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb, Chairman of the BCL, constituted a Task Group on Children and the Liturgy. The Committee on the Liturgy remained regularly involved in the work of the Task Group as it developed a revised LMC, based upon the *New American Bible* translation of the scriptures as used in the

⁸⁹ Cfr. SCDW, Prot. N. 1259/91.

approved and confirmed *Lectionary for Mass* for use in the Dioceses of The United States of America.

The Committee's adaptation of this text is described in the new introduction to the revised LMC.⁹⁰ In the preparation of this Lectionary, readings from the Lectionary for Mass which were judged beyond the understanding of children or too lengthy were adapted in the following ways:

1. Pericopes have been shortened when the complex subject matter would challenge a child's limited attention span. In exceptional circumstances an entire reading has been omitted. Stories, however, have usually been left intact. For some more important texts the value of proclaiming the integral text was seen as more important than making a host of small alterations or omissions for the sake of comprehension.

2. Because meaning is so often conveyed by context, this revision has concentrated on the abridgement of texts, rather than the systematic replacement of individual words. When a word was judged to be a great impediment to a child's understanding, however, it was replaced in such a way "that the meaning of the text or the intent and, as it were, style of the Scriptures were not distorted."

3. Responsorial Psalms have usually been shortened to three verses in consideration of a child's limited attention span.

In November, 2000, the members of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops again approved the need for a LMC and called for its revision. On November 15, 2005, the Latin Church members of the USCCB approved the revised edition of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* for use in the dioceses of the United States of

⁹⁰ Cfr. n. 18.

America. This volume will now be submitted for the review of the SCDW in consideration of the granting of a decree of confirmation.

In the Spanish language, the LMC made its appearance in 1984, through the efforts of the Spanish Conference of Bishops.⁹¹ Unfortunately, this Lectionary remains unknown to most pastors and communities, and no other LMC has officially been prepared by any other Spanish speaking conference of bishops. There are no records or commentaries of the history, evolution, or pastoral usage of the Spanish LMC. The Introduction – *Orientaciones pastorales al Leccionario para las misas con niños* – presents the principles for the celebration of the Word with children following closely that which is presented in the DMC and the GIRM:

- Pastoral care of children in the Church;
- The reading of the Word of God in Masses with children;⁹²
- The responsorial psalm;⁹³
- The homily;⁹⁴
- The introduction to the readings;⁹⁵
- The ministry of the reader;
- Actions and rites;⁹⁶
- Acclamations and song;

The pericopes chosen in the LMC from Spain correspond to the ones in the American LMC, with a few exceptions, and the principles for adaptation and

⁹¹ Conferencia Episcopal Española, *Leccionario para las Misas con niños* (Madrid: Coeditores Litúrgicos, 1984).

⁹² Cfr. DMC, n. 43.

⁹³ Ibid., n. 45.

⁹⁴ Ibid., nn. 23-24.

⁹⁵ Ibid., n. 23.

⁹⁶ GIRM, nn. 82.84.94-95., DMC, n. 34.

simplification of language mirror the DMC. Perhaps its contribution is the addition of brief introduction to the all the readings and psalms. These introductions give a small panorama of the reading and a hermeneutical key for the children's understanding of Scripture.

b) The Lectionary

The LMC is an effort to respect the nature of children by taking childhood faith seriously. Children need to celebrate *their* faith, which is not the faith of the adults. The simplified language and the carefully chosen Scripture passages nourish the child's faith in accord with the child's age and developmental level. The LMC is also a means of gradually initiating the child into the worship of the adult Christian community. Although "it should not be presumed that children will proclaim the Word of God in the celebrations in which this Lectionary is used,"⁹⁷ a simplified edition enables older children and teenagers to proclaim the Word and thus demonstrate to the younger children the privilege of proclaiming the Word and the importance of the role of the assembly in the Eucharistic liturgy through the diversity of ministries.⁹⁸

A unique feature of the LMC, both in the English and Spanish editions, is that it is a translation from the original languages rather than a paraphrase or adaptation of the Scripture. The DMC does not favor the use of paraphrases because they frequently change the meaning of the text or emphasize extraneous elements to the detriment of accuracy.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ LMCIn, n. 20

⁹⁸ Cfr. K. Dooley, *To Listen and Tell. Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1993), pp.22-28.

⁹⁹ Cfr. DMC, n. 45. For an excellent review of "Children's Bibles" see G. Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992), pp. 178-193.

Adaptation uses existing translations as they are but often shortens or omits passages in order to render the translation more suitable to a particular group. The *Sunday Lectionary for Children* is one of the best examples of an adapted text.¹⁰⁰ Translation, for the other part, is “the systematic communication of message from one language to another”¹⁰¹ and may be either of two types. It can be traditional, that is, attempting to retain as much as possible of the form (word order, sentence structure, style) of the original text or a contemporary translation that focuses more on expressing the meaning of the original in an accurate and current style. This type of translation goes beyond a formal correspondence and tries “to decode the meaning of one culture and time as expressed in the idiosyncratic language of an individual author into a quite different language or another culture and time but without tampering with the integrity of the meaning.”¹⁰² The LMC is unique because it is an official translation and not an adaptation or paraphrase.¹⁰³

Two pastoral situations provide additional reasons for the development of a lectionary for liturgical use with children: Masses with adults (usually on Sunday) in which children also participate and Masses (generally on weekdays) with children in which only a few adults participate. The DMC suggests that in the first situation, it may *occasionally* be appropriate for the children to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word apart from the adult assembly.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ P. Freeburg, E. Matthews, C. Walker (under the direction of C. Brusselmans), *Sunday Lectionary for Children* (Loveland, OH: Treehaus Communications, 1990-1993).

¹⁰¹ Newman, *FDLC Newsletter* 7.

¹⁰² W. Hutchinson, “Selecting a Bible: Which Translation?” *The Living Light* 17 (1980): p. 353.

¹⁰³ A. Tos, ed., *Lectionary for Children’s Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1974).

¹⁰⁴ Cfr. DMC, n. 17.

c) *Organization of the Lectionary for Masses with Children*

The Introduction to the (English) *Lectionary for Masses with Children* (LMCIn) follows the same pattern as other ecclesial documents by offering both theological background and suggestions for practical implementation. It is far richer than the “Orientaciones Pastorales” of the Spanish LMC. There are four parts in the LMCIn. The first section, “The Liturgical Celebration of the Word of God” provides the context for understanding the use of this Lectionary. An underlying emphasis in part one is the *ritual nature* of proclamation of the Word within a liturgical celebration. Part two, “The Celebration of the Word of God with Children” outlines the basic principles to be followed in celebrations of the Word with children. The third part provides directives for understanding and using the Lectionary, and the fourth segment focuses on “Particular Issues” that pertain to the Liturgy of the Word when it is celebrated with children.

The Introduction provides the background for the LMC but presumes that those who use it are familiar with the LMCIn, the DMC and RCIA. The *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* in nos. 1-10 provides profound theological reflection on the Word of God in liturgical celebration and the Word of God in the Church’s life. A major motivation behind the approved adaptations is that “children must not be allowed to feel neglected;”¹⁰⁵ that from the earliest age, children will have a sense of belonging to the assembly.

The LMC in its organization and readings follows as closely as possible the “Adult” *Lectionary for Mass*. The book is divided into five major parts, preceded by an Introduction. The first section provides Sunday readings for the seasons and for Ordinary

¹⁰⁵ A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, p. 446.

Time. On Sunday all three readings from the *Lectionary for Mass* are included when they are not too difficult for elementary children to understand. When a reading (usually the second reading) was judged to be beyond the comprehension of young children, it was omitted. In general, the Gospel readings are the same as in the *Lectionary for Mass*, but in some instances, one or more verses have been omitted. There is always at least one reading given in addition to the Gospel.

Instead of providing readings for every weekday of the year, the Lectionary provides sets of readings for the liturgical seasons. Each set of readings has a particular focus that adequately represents the images fundamental to the understanding of the celebration of that season.¹⁰⁶ No yearly cycle is indicated and the readings may be used in either Cycle I or Cycle II. The weekday selections for Ordinary Time contain readings from all four Gospels.

The Lectionary also has a collection of readings for the celebrations proper to the saints and various Masses for ritual and special occasions. Gospel acclamations and texts for responsorial psalms have been adapted in order to make them more suitable for singing. Some of the refrains are shortened or replaced.

In choosing the readings, special care was taken to avoid pericopes or verses that could readily admit of anti-Jewish, racist, classist or sexist interpretation. In some instances this meant putting clauses into the plural so as to be inclusive in language, without affecting the meaning of the clause. Individuals are not described by their disability, i.e., “a paralytic” or a “leper” but as a man or woman who is paralyzed, a man

¹⁰⁶ Cfr. LMCIn, n. 28

or woman with leprosy, etc. Brevity is generally characteristic of the pericopes selected but the criterion is “the quality of the texts from the Scriptures”¹⁰⁷ rather than length.

The Lectionary is written in simplified language but it is not necessarily associated with reading ability. The Bible is more often heard than read so the translators of the Contemporary English Version emphasized stylistic concerns—the rhythm of a passage, the length of paragraphs and indentations- to ensure ease in reading aloud.¹⁰⁸ Attention is given to sentence structure in order that there be a naturalness of order and progression.¹⁰⁹ Although there is an effort to have the language and concrete images reflect the children’s actual ability, the text also challenges their understanding and growth in faith by the use of image and metaphor that is integral to the Christian tradition.¹¹⁰

In providing a Lectionary for Masses in which a large number of children are present, “the Church intends to lead them into one community of faith, formed by the proclamation of the Word of God.”¹¹¹ The Introduction describes the various instances when the LMC may be used: Sunday Masses when a large number of children are present along with adults; a Liturgy of the Word for children in a separate space; Masses at which most of the assembly consists of children, such as School Masses; other liturgical celebrations in the context of the liturgical year; and family prayer.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ DMC, n. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Cfr. P. Freeburg, E. Matthews, C. Walker, et al. *Sunday Lectionary for Children*.

¹⁰⁹ For the principles that underlie a translation, see B. Newman, “Readability and the New International Version of the New Testament,” *The Bible Translator* 31 (July 1980): pp. 325-336.

¹¹⁰ Cfr. K. Dooley. *To Listen and Tell. Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children*. p. 28.

¹¹¹ LMCIn, n. 12.

¹¹² Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 14.

Sunday Assembly

The LMC gives permission for the Lectionary to be used at Sunday Masses in which a considerable number of children are present¹¹³ but immediately qualifies this approval in the following paragraph.¹¹⁴ The concern is for proper balance and consideration for the entire assembly: Priests celebrants should not use this LMC exclusively or even preferentially at Sunday Masses, even though large number of children are present. This was established as a first principle by the SCDW which granted permission for the use of the Lectionary.¹¹⁵ Moreover, on the major feasts of Christmas Day, Epiphany, Sundays of Lent, Easter Sunday, Ascension and Pentecost, the readings from the LMC are used only if the children's Liturgy of the Word takes place apart from the main assembly. The purpose of this directive is to ensure that the universal Lectionary will take precedence over the children's Lectionary on those major feasts and seasons, and to preserve the fullest reality of the liturgical assembly, that is children and adults together (LMCIn 54). For the same reasons no readings are provided for the Easter Triduum.

Liturgy of the Word for Children in a Separate Space

Many parishes throughout the United States – this is not the case of Puerto Rico – have initiated “Children’s Liturgy of the Word” at the Sunday celebration. Part two of the Introduction to the LMC delineates basic principles for celebrating the Word with children:

- Biblical readings should never be omitted;

¹¹³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 12.

¹¹⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 13

¹¹⁵ See the document of the SCDW giving recognition to the LMC.

- All integral ritual elements pertaining to the Liturgy of the Word should be preserved in celebrations with children;
- The purpose of the LMC is to lead children to actively participate in the worship of the entire assembly, not the establishment of a different rite for children;¹¹⁶
- Liturgical dismissals are to be used in separate Liturgies of the Word;
- The full Sunday assembly remains the goal toward which all children are to be led;
- A homily of biblical reflection is to be given at Masses with children.

The Introduction to the LMC provides several suggestions for preparing the Liturgy of the Word with children but presumes that all implicated agents are familiar with the DMC.

Dismissal

The Introduction directs that children gather with the entire assembly to participate in the introductory rites.¹¹⁷ After the opening prayer, the dismissal of the children can take place in several ways. The presider calls the children and catechists forward, and then invites them to celebrate the Word. The presider with the community may then pray over the children or may simply present the book of reading with some words. He may also indicate some aspect of the readings of the day or invite the assembly to pray over the children while the presider prays that their hearts and minds will be open to the Word of God. This introduction or prayer is followed by a formal dismissal.

¹¹⁶ Cfr. DMC, n. 3.

¹¹⁷ Cfr. LMCIn, n. 8.

The children and leaders process from the church. They may be led by a cross bearer and candle bearers to the designated space. In this procession the Book of Gospels should be carried with reverence. The worship space where the Liturgy of the Word will be celebrated with children should be carefully planned and prepared since “the place where the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated may influence how the children receive God’s Word”.¹¹⁸ Once the children arrive at their worship space (usually a chapel), it may be necessary to regather the attention of the children through prayer or some simple signs.

Proclamation of the Word

Normally three Scripture readings are selected, but if they are not suitable to the understanding of the children, one or two of the readings may be omitted. However, the Gospel should always be read. Brief introductory comments may precede the readings in order to help the children to listen better and make the biblical readings their own (DMC 47). The Spanish LMC provides these introductions to most readings.

In proclaiming the Word, the reader needs to read the text slowly, with expression and with an awareness that it is God who speaks in this proclamation. Because of this only appropriate readers should be chosen.

Acclamations

Chants between the readings are an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word¹¹⁹ and are a way to respond to God’s Word. The psalm is meant to be sung, and the LMC has adapted the psalms in order to foster the singing of these texts.¹²⁰ Some refrains and psalms have been shortened or replaced if the imagery seemed unsuitable for the young

¹¹⁸ LMCIn , n. 49

¹¹⁹ Cfr. GIRM, n. 36.

¹²⁰ Cfr. LMCIn, n. 20.

child. Similarly, the Gospel acclamation, a reflection on the Word of God proclaimed and a preparation for the Gospel, is also intended to be sung. If only one reading is chosen, the singing may follow the homily.¹²¹ The important thing in choosing the music is: Does the music chosen enable the children to express their faith? Does it help them to pray liturgically?

Homily

The homily should be given great prominence in all Masses with children. If the priest finds it difficult to adapt himself to the mentality of children, with the consent of the pastor, one of the adults participating in these celebrations may speak to the children after the Gospel.¹²² The non-verbal message of parents, women, or youth having responsibility for reflecting on the Word gives the child a positive message about the meaning of the Church.

The suggestion that someone other than the priest speak to the children after the Gospel was a startling innovation when the DMC first suggested it. It remains so to this day in Masses with children, even when subsequent Vatican documents have insisted in having the ordinary homily delivered only by ordained ministers. The recent Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* has retained the prohibition of having non-ordained faithful preach at Mass:

The homily, which is given in the course of the celebration of Holy Mass and is a part of the Liturgy itself, “should ordinarily be given by the Priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating Priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to a Deacon, but never to a layperson. In particular cases and for a

¹²¹ Cfr. DMC, n. 46.

¹²² Cfr. LMCIn, n. 10.

just cause, the homily may even be given by a Bishop or a Priest who is present at the celebration but cannot concelebrate.¹²³

The prohibition of the admission of laypersons to preach within the Mass applies also to seminarians, students of theological disciplines, and those who have assumed the function of those known as “pastoral assistants”; nor is there to be any exception for any other kind of layperson, or group, or community, or association.¹²⁴

But the exception made for children’s Liturgy of the Word is still in effect. In fact, it has been recently quoted in other normative documents of the SCDW, such as the disciplinary letter of the SCDW to the neocatechumenal way.¹²⁵

The DMC also suggests dialogue homilies at Masses with Children.¹²⁶ With young children this often takes the form of a series of questions which the children are called upon to answer. But the dialogue can also engage in mutual exchange when the group is small and there is careful preparation on the part of the homilist.

Creed

The creed, recited on Sunday and other principal days in the Church year, is also a way for the children to respond and give assent to the Word of God heard in the readings

¹²³ Cfr. SCDW “*Redemptionis Sacramentum*. Instruction on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist,” *Eucharistic Documents for the New Millennium*, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), n. 64.

¹²⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 66.

¹²⁵ Cfr. SCDW. “Lettera della Congregazione per il Culto Divino al Cammino Neocatecumenale.” *L’Osservatore Romano* 2:12 (2005) 1. The letter advises the neocatechumenal way: “3. L’omelia, per la sua importanza e natura, è riservata al sacerdote o al diacono (cfr. C.I.C., can. 767 § 1). Quanto ad interventi occasionali di testimonianza da parte dei fedeli laici,... § 2 - “È lecita la proposta di una breve didascalia per favorire la maggior comprensione della liturgia che viene celebrata e anche, eccezionalmente, qualche eventuale testimonianza...” The letter makes reference to the DMC in n. 3, making possible interventions of the faithful in the homily through a dialogical homily: “La possibilità del ‘dialogo’ nell’omelia (cfr. *Directorium de Missis cum Pueris*, n. 48) può essere, talvolta, prudentemente usata dal ministro celebrante come mezzo espositivo, con il quale non si delega ad altri il dovere della predicazione”.

¹²⁶ Cfr. DMC, n. 48.

and through the homily.¹²⁷ The Apostle's Creed, rather than the Nicene Creed, may be used with children because the former is part of their catechetical formation.¹²⁸ Other adaptations can be used that are consonant with the child's level of understanding and that enable the child to grow into adult expression of faith. The format of questions and answers, as used in the Rite of Baptism or the Easter Vigil, could be used.

General Intercessions

The prayer of the faithful concludes the Liturgy of the Word. These can help the children in their experience of prayer but attention should be given so that the intercessions do not center only on the needs of children but on the needs and concerns of the local assembly and entire Church. Children can participate in the prayers either by reading, spontaneous petitions or by their response or song.

Return to the Assembly

The children return to their families at the conclusion of the prayers. The children should return to the congregation in procession so that they can return to their seats in an orderly way and have a sense of transition to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

C. A Reflection on the Documents on the Liturgy with Children

The documents of the renewal of the liturgy with children are documents concerned with the spiritual formation of people enabling them to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ, according to their age.¹²⁹ Liturgy and catechesis share the same goal. The goal is for children to have a deeper participation in the Paschal Mystery. Our efforts with children are not concerned with the accumulation

¹²⁷ Cfr. GIRM, n. 43.

¹²⁸ Cfr. DMC, n. 49.

¹²⁹ Cfr. SC, n. 2.

of data or information about the liturgy, but that their lives are conformed to the Gospel message.¹³⁰ “All liturgical and Eucharistic formation should be directed toward a greater and greater response to the Gospel in the daily life of the children”.¹³¹ The documents acknowledge a liturgical catechesis that takes place through the prayers, rites and actions that call forth in the community a conversion that is not only intellectual but a conversion of the whole person.¹³² The intention of the documents is not necessarily that children know more of the liturgy but that they “act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8) in an existential and pedagogical experience of the Paschal Mystery. The DMC fosters that experiential rather than doctrinal catechesis that is dependent on the movement of the Spirit in the liturgy, which converts and forms us into a people gathered for mission through the power of word and sacrament.¹³³ Children at liturgy are believers, not students.

The *Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy* recognizes Christ’s presence “when the Church prays and sings”.¹³⁴ In the liturgy, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the healthy and the ill – all the faithful – form a “holy people, a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (I Peter 2). The reality of our Church is messy and glorious, sinful and holy, adults and children called together. Therefore, any appearance of “division among the faithful should be avoided ... they should become one body, hearing the Word of God,

¹³⁰ Cfr. G. Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1992).

¹³¹ DMC, n. 15.

¹³² Cfr. M. Filippi, “Il Direttorio nella luce della pedagogia catechistica,” *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): pp. 640-657.

¹³³ Cfr. A. Haguin, «Le Directoire romain pour les messes d’enfants,» *La Maison Dieu* 119 (1974): pp. 122.

¹³⁴ SC, n. 7.

joining in prayers and song”.¹³⁵ All “should experience a full and joyful welcome into the community and enter into closer ties with other faithful”.¹³⁶

All the recommendations of the documents on the liturgy with children are to this end: that the children may “actively participate in the Eucharist with the people of God and have their place at the Lord’s table,”¹³⁷ the source of the true Christian spirit. The witness of adults has a great effect on children, and the presence of children spiritually benefits the adult community. “A genuine Christian life in the adult community is an excellent contribution toward providing in depth formation of children.”¹³⁸ Thus great care should be taken that the children do not feel neglected.

Simplicity not Childishness

The documents are a direct result of the Church’s realization of the need for liturgical adaptation. Flowing from the spirit of the DMC, the EPMC, and the LMC, comes certain principles that have to be understood, learned, and adhered to before plunging into what we can or cannot do in Masses in which children participate. First and foremost, the adaptation of the liturgy of the Church for children is not a matter “of creating some entirely special rite but a matter of retaining, shortening, or omitting some elements or of making a better selection of texts.”¹³⁹ In planning Masses with children, creative energies should not be spent in creating something new or adding something different for children. “The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity. They

¹³⁵ GIRM, n. 62.

¹³⁶ RCIA, n. 246.

¹³⁷ Cfr. DMC, n. 12. See also, Guglielmoni, “Le preci eucaristiche per la messa dei fanciulli. Spunti di riflessione e suggerimenti per la loro utilizzazione,” pp. 57-68.

¹³⁸ Cfr. GCD, n. 79.

¹³⁹ Cfr. DMC, n. 3.

should be short, clear, and free from useless repetitions.”¹⁴⁰ What is called for is simplicity not childishness. Chapter three of the DMC which addresses Masses with children in which only a few adults participate gives permissions and makes suggestions in retaining, shortening, or omitting some elements so that the principles of noble simplicity and the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy can be maintained. Thus “some rites and texts should never be adapted for children lest the difference between Masses with children and Masses with adults becomes too great.”¹⁴¹

In whatever way the liturgy is being adapted, the children have to be able to recognize the action as being the worship of the Church.¹⁴² In an effort to be creative and to hold the attention of children, many things are added making the liturgy very busy and sometimes unrecognizable. For example, instead of unleashing the primary symbols of the Church such as assembly, oil, laying on of hands, bread and wine, cross, and Easter candle, some try to create new ones –butterflies, balloons, rainbows. Liturgical catechesis is attentive to the symbolic nature of the liturgy. Symbols are a form of nonverbal catechesis and nonverbal catechesis develops religious imagination. The Directory acknowledges the use of gestures, postures, and actions as “very important for Masses with children in view of the nature of the liturgy as an activity of the entire person and in view of the psychology of children.”¹⁴³ Attention to this is one of the urgent needs of contemporary liturgical renewal.¹⁴⁴ Our children must experience giving gifts, wanting, receiving, sharing, listening, processing, standing, and observing a reverent silence as one

¹⁴⁰ Cfr. CSL, n. 34.

¹⁴¹ Cfr. DMC, n. 39.

¹⁴² See W. Conte, “Il Direttorio per le messe dei fanciulli: Dieci anni di valutazione e di sperimentazione,” *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 99 (1985): pp. 128-163.

¹⁴³ DMC, n. 33.

¹⁴⁴ See EACW, n. 11.5.

people. Implementing the DMC and using the other documents, serve as a tool for liturgical catechesis in that they serve to awaken children's consciousness to symbolic nonverbal language.¹⁴⁵

Participation and Belonging

A second principle for adapting the liturgy for children coming out of the documents is that all adaptations should lead the children to a deeper participation and a greater sense of belonging in the assembled people of God. For example, children can be dismissed from the assembly for a separate Liturgy of the Word in another space but “before the Eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile been celebrating their own Liturgy of the Word.”¹⁴⁶ Infants who are not yet able to take part in the Mass and are in a separate space “may be brought in at the end of Mass to be blessed together with the rest of the community.”¹⁴⁷ Crucial to implementation of the DMC is the understanding that this document is not about separating children but incorporating them into the assembly. This is emphasized in the name of the document. It is the Directory for Masses *with* Children rather than the Directory for Masses *for* Children. The experience of standing, praying, and singing as one people in the worship space is ritual expression of membership and identity in the People of God. Children need to be a part of this.¹⁴⁸

A third principle in adapting the liturgy for children evident in the documents is that liturgical formation is not separated from life. Liturgical formation is built on human

¹⁴⁵ Cfr. M. Filippi, “Il Direttorio nella luce della pedagogia catechistica,” *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): pp. 640-657.

¹⁴⁶ DMC, n. 17.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 16.

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. D.A. Stosur, “Children, Go? Children’s Liturgy of the Word and the Sunday Assembly,” *Emmanuel* 6 (1999).

experiences. The perception of Christian values grows out of such experiences as “exchange of greetings, capacity to listen and to seek and grant pardon, expression of gratitude, experience of symbolic actions, a meal of friendship and festive celebration.”¹⁴⁹ Worship is experiential. Children of all ages must be seen as capable of participation. Even if parents are weak in faith the DMC encourages them to share these human values if they seek Christian formation for their children. Spirituality speaks to the real. One cannot separate liturgy and life.

The Church earnestly desires to promote an active, conscious participation in the liturgy of the Church.¹⁵⁰ The Directory fosters full, conscious and active participation of children. “The contents of the Directory are intended to help children quickly and joyfully to encounter Christ together in the Eucharistic celebration.”¹⁵¹

Perhaps this is the most important contribution of the post-conciliar documents on the liturgy with children.¹⁵² They remind the community that great care has to be taken so that children do not feel neglected and can stand counted among the baptized, one faithful people called to the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist so that all the faithful can become what they have received, the Body of Christ.

¹⁴⁹ DMC, nn. 11. 9.

¹⁵⁰ Cfr. NCD, nn. 11.36., in the spirit of SC.

¹⁵¹ DMC, n. 55.

¹⁵² Cfr. J. Gallet, “Documents of Formation: The Directory for Masses with Children and the Lectionary for Masses with Children – Another Look,” pp. 141-147.

V. LITURGY AND CULTURE: LITURGICAL METHODOLOGY AND THE INCULTURATION OF THE EUCHARIST WITH CHILDREN

After having surveyed implications of the diverse disciplines of theology, spirituality, psychology, and pedagogy on children we have presented the panorama of the documents and rites on the celebration of the Eucharist with children. All these different areas become embodied in a particular cultural context. In this chapter, I will present the concepts of culture, especially through the lens of postmodernism and Hispanic contextual theologies to arrive at the methodology of liturgical inculturation. The documents and rites of children's liturgies will be given light from the theological contributions of Vatican II and the methodology of Anscar J. Chupungco. In this way, I will be able to analyze the "culture of children" underlying these texts and rites.

A. The Concept of Culture

There are so many definitions of culture, and there is an immense literature on the subject. The understanding of culture has itself changed throughout time. A number of authors are now referring to premodern, modern, and postmodern concepts of culture.¹ Put simply, *premodern* concepts of culture associate the term with the refinements of a given people. To have culture is to be civilized, to know and put into practice the rules of what constitute the most respected forms of behavior. This use of the term culture was

¹ See for example: K. Tanner, *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

characterized by Bernard Lonergan as the “classical concept of culture.”²

Modern understandings of culture are rooted in German Romanticism, notably in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder.³ Culture is seen as the trinity of language, custom, and territory. This understanding of culture underlies much of modern cultural anthropology. It gives priority to bounded, rural cultures which have been the favorite objects of study by cultural anthropologists.⁴

Postmodern theories of culture see culture as a field upon which identities are negotiated.⁵ These try to name the forces at work in culture and the power relations between them. In a way they combine elements of modern cultural analysis with social analysis.⁶ The postmodern dimension of this approach emphasizes the fragmentary, fluid, and eclectic or hybrid aspects of the culture-making process. Postmodern theories are especially useful for looking at the forging of urban identities, and in dealing with the turbulence of migration.

Today’s theology moves between modern and postmodern understandings of culture. For example, much of the literature of Hispanic contextual theologies reflects a modern sense of the concept of culture.⁷ This is evident, for example, in studies on Hispanic popular religion, which many times has roots in traditions coming from rural areas. The boundedness of the modern culture concept also makes it a more manageable category. Moreover, many of the current Hispanic theologians likely received training in

² T. Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 72.

³ Cfr. J. Gottfried Herder, *On World History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

⁴ Cfr. A. Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologist’s Account* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁵ Cfr. D. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), p. 294.

⁶ See H. Foster, *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

⁷ Cfr. R.J. Schreiter, “Contextualization in U.S. Hispanic Theology,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 8:2 (2000): pp. 18-32.

cultural analysis in the time before postmodern concepts of culture would have been developed. But, one may also find postmodern approaches in the newest generation of Hispanic intellectuals.⁸

1. Postmodern Theory of Culture

How does postmodernism⁹ understand culture, in contrast to modernism? Evidently, my intention here is not to present a study on postmodernism. Rather the focus is on the postmodern understanding of culture and how this understanding challenges the process of liturgical inculturation with children.

The *modern concept of culture* is represented by the anthropological concept that emerged as a theoretical construct after the 1920s, especially on the American scene. This concept was used to account for differences in customs and practices of a particular human society. They are explained in terms of cultures rather than in terms of God's will, racial or generational variations, environmental factors, or differences in origin. Furthermore, in this understanding of culture, no evaluative judgment is made as to whether a particular culture represents a less noble or less developed stage of human evolution.¹⁰

This anthropological approach to culture tends to view it as a human universal. That is realized in particular forms by each social group as its distinct way of life. Culture is constituted by the conventions created by the consensus of a group into which its

⁸ Cfr. E. C. Fernandez, *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology, 1972-1998* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. 38-88.

⁹ Conventionally, the overarching term postmodernism refers to the cultural and social shift that has emerged since the 1930s and has been making its way from the West to the other parts of the world through the process of globalization. During the 1960s, this phenomenon made its influence felt first in architecture and the arts, then invaded literature, philosophy and theology, and by the 1980s became a general characteristic of popular culture.

¹⁰ Cfr. D. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, pp. 111-117.

members are socialized. Given this notion of culture as group-differentiating, anthropologists commonly perceive the culture of a social group as a whole, as a single complex unit, and distinguish it from the social behaviors of its members.¹¹ Culture is seen as the ordering principle and control mechanism of social behaviors without which human beings would be formless. Above all, culture is seen as an integrated and integrating whole whose constituent elements are interrelated to one another.¹² These elements are thought to be integrated into each other because they are perceived as expressing a fundamental theme, style or purpose, supposed to function with a view to maintain and promote the stability of the social order. Thanks to this approach to culture, anthropologists can avoid ethnocentrism, concentrating on an accurate description of a particular culture, rather than judging it according to some presumed norms of truth, goodness and beauty.¹³

The modern concept of culture has its own advantages. As Robert Schreiter has noted, the concept of culture as an integrated system of beliefs, values and behavioral norms has much to commend it.¹⁴ Among other things, it promotes a sense of coherence and communion in opposition to the fragmentation of mass society. Religion as a quest for meaning and wholeness is seen as a boon to these positive aspects of culture.¹⁵

In recent years, however, this modern concept of culture has been subjected to a critique. The view of culture as a self-contained and clearly bounded whole, as an internally consistent and integrated system of beliefs, values and behavioral norms that

¹¹ Cfr. A. Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologist's Account*, p. 226-239.

¹² See S. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Maiden: Blackwell Press, 1996).

¹³ Cfr. D. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, p. 118. Kellner offers a systematic study of the origin of the discourse of the modern and postmodern in historical, sociological, cultural, and philosophical studies.

¹⁴ Cfr. R.J. Schreiter, "Contextualization in U.S. Hispanic Theology," pp.18-32.

¹⁵ Cfr. A. Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologist's Account*, p. 75.

functions as the ordering principle of a social group and into which its members are socialized, has been shown to be based on unjustified assumptions.¹⁶ Against this conception of culture it has been argued that by postmodern approaches, that:¹⁷

- it focuses exclusively on culture as a finished product and therefore pays insufficient attention to culture as a historical process;
- its view of culture as a consistent whole is dictated more by the anthropologist's aesthetic need and the demand for synthesis than by the lived reality of culture itself;
- its emphasis on consensus as the process of cultural formation obfuscates the reality of culture as a site of struggle and contention;
- its view of culture as a principle of social order belittles the role of the members of a social group as cultural agents;
- this view privileges the stable elements of culture and does not take into adequate account its innate tendency to change and innovation; and
- its insistence on clear boundaries for cultural identity is no longer necessary since it is widely acknowledged today that change, conflict, and contradiction are resident within culture itself and are not simply caused by outside dissension.

Rather than as a homogeneous and integrated whole, culture today is seen as “a ground of contest in relations” and as a historically evolving, fragmented, inconsistent, conflicted, constructed, ever-shifting and porous social reality.¹⁸

¹⁶ See the chapter on “Modernity to Postmodernity” in D. Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*.

¹⁷ For an explanation of these views, see: B. Smart, *Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 85-127.

¹⁸ Cfr. R. K. Brewer, *Postmodernism* (Lincoln: iUniverse Press, 2002), pp. 3-13.

Like the modern anthropological concept of culture as a unified whole, the postmodern globalized concept of culture as a ground of contest in relations has its own strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, it takes into account features of culture that had been forgotten. While recognizing that harmony and wholeness remain ideals, it views culture in its lived reality of fragmentation and conflict.¹⁹ Cultural meanings are not simply discovered but are constructed and produced in power relations. It recognizes the important role of power in the formation of cultural identity. Furthermore, it sees culture as a changing historical process, but without a clearly defined *telos* and a controllable and predictable synthesis.²⁰ On the negative side, this postmodern concept of culture runs the risk of fomenting fundamentalistic tendencies, cultural and social ghettoization, and a romantic retreat to an idealized past.²¹

Postmodern understandings of culture will not replace modern understandings, but may be more useful in certain settings. I am thinking especially of urban settings, where identities are being negotiated amid other ethnicities; of dealing with children and youth, who find themselves at the juncture of their forebears' culture, the global youth culture, and the larger culture of their immediate environment.

2. The Challenge of Hispanic Contextual Theologies

All these modern and postmodern understandings of culture have been analyzed by Hispanic contextual theologies.²² Where does all of this suggest that a practical liturgical theology of children in the Hispanic context might go? I find R. Schreiter's

¹⁹ Cfr. B. Smart, *Postmodernity*, p. 127.

²⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*

²¹ Cfr. R. K. Brewer, *Postmodernism*, p. 37.

²² See E. C. Fernandez, *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology, 1972-1998*. Especially chapter 4, on "U.S. Hispanic Theology as Contextual Theology."

directions on the future of Hispanic contextual theologies very useful in pointing out some challenges for our project.²³

a) A practical liturgical theology of children in the Hispanic context of Puerto Rico should use as focus the field of aesthetics, of such importance in the modern/postmodern debate, emphasizing its own categories, such as *areyto*²⁴ and *fiesta*. Perhaps it has to bring some of its own experience to bear on the larger problems of contextual theology (such as the relation of premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity, realizing that the categories of *areyto* and *mestizaje* contribute to the larger discussion of changes in cultural patterns.

b) Hispanic contextual theology has been recognized as an important aid in teaching others about the intersection of the global and the local as the locus for contextual theology. A practical liturgical theology of children in Puerto Rico can also shed light on the Church's contribution to the cultural debate in Puerto Rico, where modern and postmodern, Hispanic and American influences intersect.

c) The emerging challenges within Hispanic communities which will need to be addressed in the next phase of a Hispanic contextual theology in the postmodern cultural context, are issues for children, youth, for women, and for the middle class, according to

²³ Cfr. R.J. Schreiter, "Contextualization in U.S. Hispanic Theology," pp. 30-31.

²⁴ "Areyto" makes reference to the Taino indian community celebration. It was a celebration consisting of the passing on of their oral history by music, song, and dance. Most of the knowledge and information that we have about the traditions of the Tainos came about the personal observations and historical documentations of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who described an "Areyto" in his personal journal: "And on this island what I could understand was that their songs which they call 'areytos,' were their history passed from person to person, fathers to sons, from the present to the future, in a celebration uniting many Indians... passing three or four hours or more until the teacher or guide of the dance finished the history, and sometimes they went from one day to the next." [Cfr. A. Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico, a Political and Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1983), p. 66.]

some theologians. This suggests of the validity and importance of a practical liturgical theology of children in the local cultural context.

d) Postmodern sociology and anthropology provide an impetus to new reflection in contextual theology. Categories of space in postmodern studies are especially important. Both spatial (*batey, plaza*)²⁵ and relational (*areyto, fiesta*) categories need to be considered in a practical liturgical theology, where the space of worship and the interrelationship of participation and liturgical ministries are so important for celebrating the liturgy with children.

e) The importance of popular religion in Hispanic culture is of relevance to Hispanic contextual theologies.²⁶ A practical liturgical theology of children should also take into consideration popular religion as it also configures the particular cultural body of inculturated worship.

3. *Popular Religion*

Perhaps some words on popular religion are necessary to explain its relevance to my project of a liturgical practical theology of children. Most people who are not part of the Hispanic world would understand popular religion through its various external rites and practices. The rituals of popular religion constitute a parallel experience of worship alongside the official liturgy of the Church. For example, popular religion has its own liturgical year. Probably some of the best known of such rituals are the celebrations which surround the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12 and the passion play

²⁵ The taino indian's ball game, called "Batu", was played in a field, which they called a "Batey", situated in the middle of the village. The fields were either shaped like a triangle or like a "U". Thus, the "Batey" became the central meeting place for the Taino community, for the "Batu", the "Areyto", and other celebrations took place in or around the "Batey". (Cfr. A. Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico, a Political and Cultural History*, p. 68).

²⁶ Cfr. V. P. Elizondo, T. M. Matovina, *Mestizo Worship: A Pastoral Approach to Liturgical Ministry* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998).

performed on Good Friday. But there are many other customs -and I will now refer to the Puerto Rican context- such as the *Misas de Aguinaldo*, celebrated the 9 days before Christmas. A 400 year old tradition, the *Misas de Aguinaldo* gather entire communities (parishes, catholic schools, local communities) to celebrate an inculturated Eucharist before dawn. Everyone brings their own native Puerto Rican musical instruments to the almost entirely sung celebration which ends up in a community *fiesta*, sharing breakfast before going on to school or work.

The *Promesa de Reyes* is a traditional Epiphany celebration in honor of the *tres Reyes Magos* (or the Three Kings) in which music, prayer, and *fiesta* become a family religious votive offering to the three Wise Men, asking for their accompaniment in the following of Christ the Light. The *fiestas patronales* (or patron saint feast celebrations) are days of prayer, song, dance, and family gatherings in honor of the local patron saint.

The Marian devotion to the Holy Rosary also occupies an important place in the “popular worship calendar,” both during the months of October and May. During the month of October children and many adults wear the *rosario* as a devotional necklace while the month of May is witness of the *rosarios de cruz*, song and worship celebrations in which the rosary becomes the instrument for presenting a deeply Christological and Marian musical prayer.

These various practices testify to how important popular religion is to the Puerto Rican cultural body. This popular religion, very much under the control of the people has *fiesta* and *community* at the heart of its experience.

A number of Hispanic theologians have been writing about the importance of popular religion and have been clarifying its place in Hispanic spirituality. Virgilio P.

Elizondo and Timothy M. Matovina, for example, have developed a pastoral approach to liturgical ministry deeply rooted in “foundational faith expressions,” in the religious traditions celebrated by the people, transmitted from generation to generation.²⁷ They base their pastoral approach in the ritual, symbolic response of the people to their history and contemporary situation, in the deep identity of the people, in their collective soul.²⁸ That pastoral response to the foundational faith expressions of Mexican Americans -this is their main interest- is a communal ritual response to their historical experience and contemporary context.

Examining those expressions of faith which they call “foundational” they knead a pastoral approach for liturgical ministry with Hispanics that promotes the mutual enrichment between liturgy and other expressions of faith which are alive and vibrant within the specific cultural context studied. They present an integrative approach to liturgical ministry that allows the community to forge a dynamic *mestizaje* between their cultural expressions of faith and the liturgical tradition of the Church.²⁹ Both Elizondo and Matovina, through their examination of popular religion and customs, arrive at a creative interplay between liturgy and the people’s faith expressions that invigorates and revitalizes common prayer.³⁰

Orlando O. Espín, studying tradition and popular religion in an attempt to understand the *sensus fidelium*,³¹ arrives at theological insights that enrich Elizondo’s and Matovina’s pastoral approach. Espín approaches popular religion systematically

²⁷ Cfr. Ibid.

²⁸ Cfr. Ibid., p. 3.

²⁹ Cfr. Ibid., pp. 71-80.

³⁰ Cfr. Ibid., pp. 81-92.

³¹ See O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997).

while Elizondo and Matovina prefer a mostly pastoral language. Espín examines the roots of Hispanic evangelization and the main symbols of popular religion in Hispanic-Latino culture (the crucified Christ and Mary) in an effort to theologically understand the cultural expression of the *sensus fidelium*. He does so by showing how these core symbols of Hispanic cultural religion convey essential contents of Christian tradition and by confronting them with Scripture, Conciliar definitions or dogmas, and with historical and sociological contexts within which those intuitions of faith and their means of expression appear. For Espín, the «faith-full intuitions», which lie at the heart of popular religion's devotional and celebrative expressions, are fundamental intuitions of the Christian faith. Popular religion is indeed a means for the communication of many Hispanic Christians' *sensus fidei*.³²

By utilizing the categories of systematic theology, Espín awards the reality of popular religion the theological importance it merits. He defends vehemently that popular religion can be theologically understood as a cultural expression of the *sensus fidelium* and as such it merits a serious consideration by theologians. This has little resonance among many theologians who have usually avoided the study of popular religion, preferring to leave the field to anthropologists and other social scientists.³³ Espín's study recognizes popular religion as a sound and important *locus theologicus* in which to discover the Gospel, as proclaimed, lived and celebrated in Latin America.

³² Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Roberto Goizueta, sees popular religion in the large context of theological anthropology.³⁴ For him the popular rites and practices are not inimical to or in competition with the liturgy itself. Both are ways of expressing the basic sacramentality of creation and our humanity. For this reason he sees Hispanic anthropology to be the opposite of liberal individualism. It is communal, that is, relational, reflecting the community that exists not only among human beings, but with creation itself.

Goizueta sees these same customs and practices of popular religion conveying an aesthetic quality to the liturgy.³⁵ They help to embody worship by bringing a deeper symbolic dimension, by providing a world where beauty and justice meet, and by being concrete experiences of the analogical imagination at work.³⁶ Goizueta sees both the liturgy and popular religion as aesthetic performances. He explains:

The purpose is not to achieve some result but rather to take part in a sacramental event. Because the persons enter into the life of Jesus with their total bodies they are sacramental, and so are intrinsically related to their communities where they find their identities and self-worth, and are empowered 'to resist the dominant culture's attempts to destroy that identity through assimilation.'³⁷

This popular religion process of resistance is evident in the Puerto Rican experience of popular religion which is an expression of resistance to American cultural assimilation through the sacramental experience of the community.

Another example of reflection on Hispanic popular religion is that of Arturo Pérez-Rodríguez and Mark Francis.³⁸ Pérez and Francis identify certain characteristics as

³⁴ See R.S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús. Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), pp. 101-132.

³⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 77-100.

³⁶ Cfr. B.T.Morrill, *Bodies of Worship. Explorations in Theory and Practice* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 90.

³⁷ Cfr. R.S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, p. 105.

³⁸ Cfr. M.R. Francis, A.J. Pérez-Rodríguez, A. Pérez, *Primero Dios: Hispanic Liturgical Resource* (Chicago: LTP, 1998).

specifically Hispanic qualities found in popular religion which can enrich the official liturgy of the Church. Hispanic worship is family-centered, including the extended family. Women also play a central role since they are the caretakers of the domestic church where popular religion resides. Mary plays an indispensable role in Hispanic religion. For many Latin American peoples, the Virgin Mary is a primary icon of the people's identity. And it is sensual worship with all the senses engaged in the process.

For Pérez, Hispanic worship is held together by a basic harmony which flows from the indigenous perspective of the intellect, the body, sexuality, and nature, as connected by the spirit of life.³⁹ He says, "Humanity, and all that makes up a person, is part of creation. The sensual nature of our body is the bridge of connection with nature. Sensuality forms the language of prayer."⁴⁰ The sensual nature of Hispanic worship shows itself in the way the liturgy is celebrated. Truly Hispanic worship wears a body that is very sensual and permeates all levels of culture. And this is evident in the Puerto Rican need for embodiment in the liturgy, as the body, the senses, the "Caribbean musical spirit," plays an important role both in popular religion and in corporate worship.

The reflection of these Hispanic theologians might result useful in opening our eyes to the contributions Hispanic popular religion can make to the Church and its worship.⁴¹ I believe they point to a Hispanic faith perspective not taken seriously by the American and European Church that can contribute to the entire community of believers.

It is not just through the celebration of the *editio typica* that we will remain faithful to the celebration of the spirit of the liturgy. The liturgy itself, as work of the

³⁹ Cfr. Ibid., p. 22-29.

⁴⁰ Cfr. Ibid., p. 32.

⁴¹ Cfr. E. C. Fernandez., *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology, 1972-1999*, pp. 159-174.

people, calls for a celebration enhanced by the people's own life, by its popular religion. By delineating how liturgy and popular religion enrich our ministerial call to know and foster the Church's liturgical tradition we can understand the importance of celebrating our people's faith expressions.⁴²

B. The Way Towards Liturgical Inculturation

The understanding of culture, which flows between modern and postmodern concepts, giving importance to the Puerto Rican popular religion and Hispanic contextual theologies, has to be addressed in the light of the developments of Vatican II's liturgical theology of inculturation. Our project of a liturgical practical theology of children in Puerto Rico needs to consider the concept of liturgical inculturation as an important category which was present in the development of the documents and rites of the liturgy with children.

1. Liturgical Inculturation following Vatican II

A reading of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* shows that Vatican II initially regarded the process of cultural adaptation of the liturgy as essentially a matter of the translation and interpretation into various cultures of the revised standard editions (*editiones typicae*) of the liturgical books. Since these books serve as the starting point for the work of inculturation, it is helpful to be familiar with how these books came to be.⁴³

Following the Council, special commissions were established under the auspices of the SCDW in Rome that were responsible the revision of the liturgy. Over the course

⁴² Cfr. V. P. Elizondo, T. M. Matovina, *Mestizo Worship*, p. 106.

⁴³ For a study of the process, see: A. Bugnini. *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1990.

of ten years, these commissions – composed of scholars, pastors and other experts in the liturgy, and advised by bishops – revised the liturgical library of the Church. Working with the critical sources of the Roman liturgy – the ancient sacramentaries, ordinals, pontificals and rituals – and conscious of the pastoral needs throughout the world, they sought to fulfill the mandate given to them by the Council: “The liturgical books are to be revised as soon as possible. Experts are to be employed on this task, and bishops from various parts of the world are to be consulted.”⁴⁴ The revisions were to be done in light of the liturgical renewal called for by the Council: full, active and conscious participation in the liturgical celebrations:⁴⁵

In this renewal, both texts and rites should be ordered so as to express more clearly the holy things which they signify. The Christian people, as far as is possible, should be able to understand them easily and take part in them in a celebration which is full, active and the community’s own.⁴⁶

The Council then proposed a prudent method to be followed in proposing the revised rites:

A careful investigation – theological, historical, and pastoral – should always, first of all, be made into each section of the liturgy which is to be revised. Furthermore the general laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy must be taken into account, as well as the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and from the concessions granted in various places. Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them, and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.⁴⁷

The revised Latin liturgical books were then subject to the approval of the SCDW.

After approval by the Holy See, they became the *editiones typicae* that were sent to the

⁴⁴ Cfr. SC, n. 25.

⁴⁵ See SC, n. 14.

⁴⁶ SC, n. 21.

⁴⁷ SC, n. 23.

various national episcopal conferences to be translated into the vernacular languages. These translations, with any corresponding adaptations, were then submitted to the Holy See for its confirmation and subsequently became the official liturgical books of the local churches. But while it may appear that this process would have produced a rather internally consistent and homogeneous product, the result was a bit more complicated.⁴⁸

Liturgical books are hybrid documents that could never be described as purely Roman either in content or style. The *editiones typicae*, before any translation, demonstrate that the Roman rite is a rite influenced by a variety of cultures.⁴⁹ The documents on the liturgy stressed the importance of conjugating both the unity of the Roman rite and the liturgical variations according to cultures. For instance, SC says:

Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved, provision shall be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples, especially in mission countries. This should be borne in mind when drawing up the rites and rubrics.⁵⁰

As the renewal progressed, national conferences of bishops prepared liturgical books in the vernacular that were based on the typical editions. Understandably, these books differ from one another in presentation and content and it is evident that the “substantial unity” of the Roman rite⁵¹ is not found in a slavish adherence to certain formal characteristics of the Roman style of prayer, or limited to the texts and rubrics of

⁴⁸ See, for example, the chapter on the process of revision of the Sacramentary in: M.R. Francis, K.F. Pecklers (ed.), *Liturgy for the New Millennium. A commentary on the Revised Sacramentary* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. 1-16.

⁴⁹ See B. Neunheuser. “Roman Genius Revisited,” in K.F. Pecklers (ed.), *Liturgy for the New Millennium. A commentary on the Revised Sacramentary*, pp. 35-48.

⁵⁰ SC, n. 38.

⁵¹ As the 1994 instruction *Varietates legitimae* (Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy) indicates, this substantial unity is expressed “in the typical editions of the liturgical books published by authority of the supreme pontiff and in the liturgical books approved by the episcopal conferences for their areas and confirmed by the Apostolic See” (n. 36).

the *editiones typicae*, but rather subsists in spite of the many differences due to liturgical inculturation.⁵²

It would be helpful to distinguish here between superficial and profound levels of inculturation. A look at the origin of the word, and how it came to replace “adaptation,” will help us see that inculturation is but one step in the process of the cultural adaptation of the liturgy. It will be necessary to present the different understandings of inculturation prior to addressing its application in a practical liturgical theology of children. We will see how it is presented by Vatican Council II, by subsequent Church documents, such as *Varietates Legitimae* and *Liturgiam Authenticam*, as well as in the liturgical methodology of Anscar J. Chupungco.

2. Vatican II: From adaptation to liturgical inculturation

While the use of the term “inculturation” has become common, especially in Catholic circles, it was not part of the vocabulary of Vatican II. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* never used the term. Instead, it used the term “adaptation” (*aptatio, accommodatio*) to speak of how the rites are to be changed to enable them communicate the Gospel more effectively to those who celebrate them.⁵³ Gradually, however, the term “inculturation” became the usual term to refer to this process in theological circles.

The term inculturation first appeared in an article by the French theologian J. Masson, who called for “a Catholicism that is inculturated in a pluriform manner.”⁵⁴ The term subsequently became popular in theological and missiological circles, and was used

⁵² Cfr. See B. Neunheuser, “Roman Genius Revisited,” in K.F. Pecklers (ed.), *Liturgy for the New Millennium. A commentary on the Revised Sacramentary*, pp. 35-48.

⁵³ In the key articles dealing with culture and the liturgy, “Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Temperament and Traditions of Peoples” (SC, 37-40), as well as subsequent articles dealing with the sacraments and sacramentals.

⁵⁴ Cfr. J. Masson, “L’Église ouverte sur le monde,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 84 (1962) : p. 1038.

in contrast to the anthropological term enculturation.⁵⁵ “Inculturation” became part of the official vocabulary of the Church when it was used in 1979 by Pope John Paul II. In an address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Pope admitted that the term was a neologism, but that it “expresses one of the elements of the great mystery of the incarnation.”⁵⁶

Why the gradual change in terminology? In the years after the Council, concern was raised that “adaptation” was too superficial a term to speak of the profound transformation that is to be brought about by the dialogue between faith and culture. Pope Paul VI clearly stated that the goal of inculturation is a more profound change, since it begins from the perspective of the hearers of the Gospel. In his 1975 encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi* he writes of the importance of going beyond the superficial aspects of a people’s way of life and taking their culture seriously as a crucial factor in evangelization:

What matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots) ... always taking the person as one’s starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.⁵⁷

Pope John Paul II, developing earlier Church teaching, described inculturation using the analogy of Christ’s incarnation. Just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God, became a Jew of first-century Palestine and so was immersed in the Jewish culture of the time, so

⁵⁵ The term enculturation describes the cultural learning process of the individual, by which a person is inserted into his or her culture. Related words such as indigenization, incarnation, contextualization, revision, accommodation and acculturation have also entered the theological lexicon to describe the process of more effectively proclaiming the faith in diverse cultural contexts.

⁵⁶ “Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission,” *Fede e cultura alla luce della Bibbia* (Torino: Elle di Ci, 1981), p. 5.

⁵⁷ Encyclical Letter *Evangelii nuntiandi* (Vatican : Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), n. 20.

the Church must become incarnated in every culture, speaking that culture's language and using its symbols to communicate the faith. Inculturation is not an option or process that is secondary to the faith. Rather, adequate cultural expression is a necessary part of how the faith itself is communicated. John Paul II wrote:

The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out.⁵⁸

Inculturation in a general sense can best be described as a dialogue between faith and culture that transforms and enriches both the culture in which the faith is proclaimed and the universal Church.⁵⁹ Just as individual cultures are enriched by the Gospel, so the Church is enriched by yet another way of seeing the grace of God expressed by another culture. But true inculturation entails conversion, a purification of those attitudes and practices in a given culture that do not conform to the Gospel of Jesus. Inculturation involves as well the humble assessment on the part of the Church of the limited way it has sometimes proclaimed the Gospel. It is in this dynamic relationship between faith and culture that the transformation brought about by inculturation takes place.

3. The Methodology of Liturgical Inculturation of A. J. Chupungco

Anscar J. Chupungco is one of the theologians that takes the question of inculturation as a lively issue in the liturgy. It has been one of his main topics of study, aside from the history of the liturgy, and thus he presents a vast knowledge of the field. A former president of the Pontifical Liturgical Institute, Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo in Rome, and founder of the Paul VI Institute of Liturgy in

⁵⁸ See John Paul II, "Opening Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture," *The Pope Speaks* 27 (1982): p. 157.

⁵⁹ Cfr. M.R. Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider. Liturgical Inculturation in the United States* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 2000), pp 58-60.

the Philippines, A. Chupungco is internationally known for his works on liturgical inculturation.

My intention here is not to present Chupungco's theology as a whole; rather the focus is only on his understanding of liturgical inculturation. One significant strength of Chupungco's reflections on the relationship of the liturgy and its cultural context is their rootedness in the history of the development of the Roman Rite and the teaching of Vatican II.⁶⁰ His knowledge of liturgical history impresses upon him the necessity of inculturation and gives him the freedom for liturgical innovation since all liturgies are culture-dependent. As he puts it later, "Perhaps the root of our woes in inculturation is the failure to recognize the basic fact that all liturgical rites are vested in culture, that no liturgy is celebrated in a cultural vacuum."⁶¹ On the other hand, Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* provides the ground from which he can sally forth into liturgical inculturation.

He describes liturgical inculturation as the process whereby the texts and rites used in liturgical worship by the local Church are so inserted in the framework of culture that they absorb its thought, language, and ritual patterns.⁶² It is basically the assimilation by the liturgy of the local cultural patterns: a process of assimilating the local culture's thought, language, value, ritual, symbolic and artistic patterns.

In his studies, Chupungco accepts that the term "inculturation" may be a liturgical neologism but he outlines the history of the liturgy for providing fine examples of

⁶⁰ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 3-17.

⁶¹ A.J. Chupungco, "Liturgy and the Components of Culture," *Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), p. 153.

⁶² Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 30; A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future. The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, p. 29.

inculturation: the classical shape which flourished in Rome after the fourth century and the Franco-Germanic form which developed during the Carolingian era on the basis of the classical Roman liturgy.⁶³

Liturgical inculturation, for Chupungco, operates according to the dynamics of insertion in a given culture and interior assimilation of cultural elements.⁶⁴ This dynamic process commits the liturgy with the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people in a framework of profound absorption.

Describing the process of liturgical inculturation, Chupungco explains that it consists in the meeting of two elements, namely, the *editiones typicae* of the liturgical books, and the patterns of the local culture.⁶⁵ Thus, the patterns of a culture enter into dialogue with the liturgical texts: thought, language, rites and symbols, literature, music, architecture, and all other expressions of the fine arts enter the conversation.

For Chupungco, inculturation does not rule out creativity. For him textual or ritual creativity is a more advanced step after inculturation.⁶⁶ “Inculturation is not the final step in the process of bringing about the reality of the liturgy for a local church.”⁶⁷ Liturgical creativity will be a final step, perhaps an imperative for a local church that wants to be relevant and have impact on the life of the faithful.⁶⁸

Let us now take a look at several important stages and processes of liturgical inculturation methodology according to Chupungco.

⁶³ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco (ed.), *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, Vol. 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997). See especially on the history of the liturgy (pp. 95-114; 131-152).

⁶⁴ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future. The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future. The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

a) Acculturation

The meaning of inculturation becomes clearer when we study it in light of the related concept of acculturation. Acculturation can be defined as “culture contact,” when two cultures come together and produce a juxtaposition of elements that remain unrelated to one another, not really influencing each other. It falls short of the transformation of both culture and Church presumed by the term “inculturation.”

b) Translation

The meaning of inculturation can also be illustrated by a reference to the translation of texts. A merely acculturated approach to translation would insist on a word-for-word correspondence with the original language. According to acculturation, fidelity to the original text is rendered only when there is a correspondence between the translation and the original text. Due to the legitimate desire to communicate doctrinal nuances and to hand on the faith of the Church intact, there are some who believe that formal correspondence is the only acceptable criterion for translation.

But, as the Italian saying goes, “*Traduttore, traditore:*” not everything expressed in the genius of one language can be translated into another, since syntax and literary convention often contain its proper nuances. Thus, the *Consilium’s* 1969 instruction on the translation of liturgical texts *Comme le prévoit* rightly insists, “In the case of liturgical communication it is necessary to take into account not only the message to be conveyed, but also the speaker, the audience, and the style.”⁶⁹ The same article of the document sums up the task of translation with the criterion of dynamic equivalence, that is, of translation as inculturation:

⁶⁹ Consilium, “Instruction on the Translation of Liturgical Texts” (*Comme le prévoit*), January 25, 1969 [LD2 227-248], n. 6.

It is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time. A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words: the total context of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language.⁷⁰

In this regard, Chupungco developed three ways of dynamic translation and finding cultural equivalents: dynamic equivalence, creative assimilation and organic progression.⁷¹ By “dynamic equivalence”, which includes translation, is meant “replacing an element of the Roman liturgy with something in the local culture that has an equal meaning and value.”⁷² By “creative assimilation,” which for Chupungco not be regarded as the ordinary method of liturgical inculturation, is meant ‘the integration of pertinent rites, symbols, and linguistic expressions, religious or otherwise, into the liturgy.’⁷³ “Organic progression” is not so much a method of inculturation as the necessity of going beyond both dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation (or acculturation and inculturation, as Chupungco uses these terms).⁷⁴ The reason for this further step is that neither Vatican II nor the post-conciliar *editiones typicae* can foresee and provide for all the particular circumstances of the local churches which must create new forms of worship to meet their own needs.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, pp. 37-50.

⁷² Cfr. Ibid. pp. 37-43.

⁷³ Cfr. Ibid. pp. 44-46.

⁷⁴ Cfr. Ibid. pp. 47-50.

⁷⁵ The work of organic progression should continue on the level of the local churches. The typical editions normally offer a wide range of options and possibilities. But the breadth of inculturation should not be hemmed in by the provisions contained in a document. The typical editions cannot possibly envisage for the local Church all the options and possibilities of inculturation. Thus their

“Dynamic equivalence” is for Chupungco the principal of these three methods. In *Liturgical Inculturation*⁷⁶ he explains that this method replaces an element of the Roman liturgy with something in the local culture that has an equal meaning or value. Dynamic equivalence has as *terminus a quo* the Roman rite in its *editio typica*, and the method will determine which of its linguistic and ritual components can be replaced with equivalent native elements. The *terminus a quem* will be the vernacular an inculturated text, which includes an appreciation of local values and embraces the entire spectrum of richness of the people’s cultural experience.⁷⁷

c) *Liturgical Inculturation*

While it may flow from acculturation and at times overlap it, inculturation is a more profound interaction between the local culture and the liturgy, to the point that the liturgy begins to appear not as an importation but as a reflection of the local culture, which at the same time challenges the culture to conversion. Liturgical inculturation is necessary when elements of the Roman rite are not capable of speaking meaningfully to the people of a given culture without profound modification.

According to Chupungco, liturgical inculturation may be defined as the process of inserting the texts and rites of the liturgy into the framework of the local culture. As a result, the texts and rites assimilate the people’s thought, language, value, ritual, symbolic and artistic pattern.⁷⁸ Liturgical inculturation is basically the assimilation by the liturgy of local cultural patterns. The liturgy is inserted into the culture, history and

provision will prove insufficient and at times also deficient when placed in confrontation with the demand for a truly inculturated liturgy. Cfr. *Ibid.* pp. 47-50.

⁷⁶ Cfr. p. 37.

⁷⁷ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future. The Process and Methods of Inculturation.* , pp. 35-36.

⁷⁸ See Chapter I, part 2, in A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, pp. 32-36.

tradition of the people among whom the Church dwells. Inculturation is not creativity (though this is not ruled out), but the dynamic translation of the typical editions into the cultures of the local churches.⁷⁹

He suggests that this process should normally start from existing models, and in practice the models are the typical editions of the liturgical books published by the Vatican after the Council. The cultural pattern of a people plays a principal role in the process of liturgical inculturation, as the dialogue partner of the typical edition of the liturgical text. Chupungco defines the cultural pattern of a people as the typical mode of thinking, speaking and expressing oneself through rites, symbols and art forms.⁸⁰ It affects society's values and ideology, social and family traditions, socio-economic life, and political system. Cultural pattern cuts across everything that constitutes the life of a society. It is a people's prescribed system of reflecting on, verbalizing, and ritualizing the values, traditions and experiences of life.

d) Creativity

In places where the culture of the local church is greatly different than that presupposed by the Roman rite, liturgical creativity will be necessary for the liturgy to speak to the people of the local culture.

Provision for "more radical adaptation of the liturgy" is made in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,⁸¹ which stipulates a process of study and experimentation by the national conference of bishops and then submission of the adaptations to Rome for confirmation. While the need for liturgical creativity in non-Western cultures is obvious, *Comme le*

⁷⁹ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future. The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, pp. 34-35.

⁸⁰ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, pp. 35-36.75.

⁸¹ Cfr. SC, n. 40

prévoit deals with this possibility for Western cultures as well: “Texts translated from another language are clearly not sufficient for the celebration of a fully renewed liturgy, The creation of new texts will be necessary.”⁸² This principle also extends beyond the composition of new texts to the development of new rituals for the celebration of the sacraments and other rites.

Liturgical inculturation then is only an intermediate step; one must move beyond it to what Chupungco calls “liturgical creativity.”⁸³ This does not mean a total disregard for tradition or any pre-existing liturgical material, Chupungco clarifies, but only “new liturgical forms not based on the Roman typical editions.”⁸⁴ He cites as examples the symbolic dance at the offertory procession, the mimetic interpretation of the Gospel reading, and the use of audiovisuals at the general intercessions. Cautiously he calls for alternative liturgies, “whose aim is to give expression to these facets of liturgical tradition or modern life that are not considered by the Roman rite.”⁸⁵ In this context he urges the creation of new sacramentals by the local churches, the cross-fertilization between liturgy and popular religion, and a liturgical catechesis based not only on the typical editions but also on the rituals created by the local church.

Creative adaptations form truly inculturated liturgies, according to Chupungco, as they are both related to the Roman typical editions and arise from the cultural patterns of

⁸² Cfr. n. 43.

⁸³ Chupungco notes that “liturgical creativity” covers a wide spectrum of meaning ranging from absolutely new forms of liturgy to a simple case of adaptation. Chupungco writes that: “We are dealing here with liturgical rites formed independently of the provision, whether explicit or implicit, of the typical editions of the Roman books. Such rites, if they are to be recognized by the church as forms of official worship must have some basis in or reference to liturgical tradition and must follow the principles concerning Christian worship.” See *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, p. 52.

⁸⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.* p. 53.

a people. Liturgical creativity is not a new notion in the history of the Church as the Church has always used its creative skill in “shaping new rites in order to transmit the message in ways that could be understood and appreciated by the worshipping community.”⁸⁶ Chupungco concludes that creativity, which has always been an inherent feature of the Church’s worship, is sometimes not a mere option but an imperative for a local church that wants its liturgy to be relevant and have impact on the life of the faithful.⁸⁷

As we have seen, then, under Vatican II’s label of “cultural adaptation of the liturgy” there are several degrees, developed by A. Chupungco: acculturation, the simple juxtaposition of local cultural elements; inculturation, a reinterpretation (dynamic translation) of Roman liturgical elements in order to communicate more effectively and faithfully the message of the Gospel; and creativity, the creation of completely new ritual elements. Acts of inculturation and creativity, of course, require a deep knowledge of the culture of the local church, as well as confirmation of the Holy See. These levels of cultural adaptation were provided for in articles 37-40 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and were further refined in subsequent documents such as *Comme le prévoit* and the 1994 instruction *Varietates legitimae* (Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy) and the 2001 instruction *Liturgiam authenticam*.

4. Liturgical adaptation according to «Varietates Legitimae» and «Liturgiam Authenticam»

After the development of Vatican II’s understanding of inculturation by A. Chupungco, it is interesting to note the subsequent Church documents that have

⁸⁶ Idem.

⁸⁷ Cfr. A. Chupungco. “Liturgy and Inculturation.” *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*. (Vol. 2). Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998. pp. 374-375.

expounded on the relationship between culture and the liturgy, especially *Varietates legitimate* and *Liturgiam authenticam*. Any evaluation of the recent documents' program of liturgical inculturation must take into account the fact that they are only intended to be an authoritative guide to the "right application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy," as the subtitle of the Instruction stipulates, and not a comprehensive manual on inculturation as such. Within this limited scope *Varietates Legitimae* envisages that "the work of inculturation does not foresee the creation of new families of rites; inculturation responds to the needs of a particular culture and leads to adaptations which still remain part of the Roman rite."⁸⁸ The Instruction clearly differentiates between two types of liturgical adaptation, namely, those that are "provided for in the liturgical books"⁸⁹ and those which are more radical.⁹⁰

These recent curial pronouncements on inculturation tend to present the issues "from the top down," arguing from previous liturgical legislation and precedents drawn from a rather focused history of the liturgy and liturgical books of the Roman Rite.⁹¹ The overarching concern of the SCDW is obviously one of preserving the "substantial unity of the Roman Rite" as it is proposed by the *editiones typicae* in order to insure that the liturgy is able to transmit the teachings of the Church in a faithful and complete manner. The new GIRM describes well the attitude of the current SCDW regarding inculturation: "inculturation requires a necessary amount of time, lest in a hasty and incautious manner

⁸⁸ SCDW, "Instruction on the Inculturation and the Roman Liturgy" (*Varietates Legitimae*) AAS 87 (1995): n. 36.

⁸⁹ As envisaged by nn. 38-39 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

⁹⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 40.

⁹¹ Cfr. J.M. Huels, "Liturgiam Authenticam: Canonical Observations," *Rite 9* (2001): pp. 1-2.

the authentic liturgical tradition suffer contamination.”⁹² The choice of adjective is important here since it betrays an attitude of caution. The liturgical tradition is authentic or “pure” and risks being “contaminated” by inculturation. As stated earlier in the same document, “the Roman Rite constitutes a notable and estimable part of the liturgical treasure and patrimony of the Catholic Church, and its riches are of benefit to the universal Church, so that were these riches lost, this would be gravely damaging to her.”⁹³ Thus, the Congregation’s starting point is the “pure” Roman Rite that needs to be protected as all absolute good, as an end in itself.

Varietates Legitimae presupposes what some would call a deficient understanding of culture.⁹⁴ The same is true of *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the *Direttorio su pieta popolare e liturgia* as well as the *editio typica tertia* of the *Missale Romanum*, in the new last chapter of the General Instruction that deals with liturgy and culture.

There seems to have been a change in ecclesiological assumptions.⁹⁵ While invoking the documents of the Second Vatican Council, both *Varietates Legitimae* and especially *Liturgiam Authenticam* make some basic assumptions about the role of the Roman Rite in the life of the Church that are clearly not the same that first undergirded liturgical reform since the Council. If we compare, for example, the official documents on translations, *Comme le prévoit* (1969) and *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001), we see that the SCDW has unilaterally repudiated many of the bedrock assumptions that guided the first translations of liturgical books. As *Comme le prévoit* had elucidated:

⁹² SCDW, *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 2000) [English: ICEL. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (Third Typical Edition)*. 2002.], n. 398.

⁹³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 397.

⁹⁴ Cfr. K.F. Pecklers, *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*. London: Continuum, 2003, p. 70.

⁹⁵ Cfr. P. Jeffery, “A Chant Historian Reads *Liturgiam Authenticam*,” *Worship* 78:4 (2004): pp. 309-341.

The prayer of the Church is always a prayer of some actual community assembled here and now. It is not sufficient that a formula handed down from some other time or region should be translated verbatim, even if accurately, for liturgical use. The formula translated must become the genuine prayer of the congregation and in it each of its members should be able to express himself or herself.⁹⁶

Liturgiam Authenticam, on the other hand, emphasizes that the words of Sacred Scripture and other utterances spoken in liturgical celebrations “express truths that transcend the limits of time and space.”⁹⁷ For that reason, “the original text, insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses.”⁹⁸ The Instruction promotes a literal translation that is much more concerned about rendering the text – both vocabulary and syntactical style – than in the understanding or participation by the congregation in the liturgical celebration. If original texts are to be proposed, *Liturgiam Authenticam* stipulated that they “are to contain nothing that is inconsistent with the function, meaning, structure, style, theological content, traditional vocabulary or other important qualities of the texts found in the *editiones typicae*.”⁹⁹ This is obviously a very different understanding from that of *Comme le prévoit* which encouraged original vernacular compositions in order to promote a fully renewed liturgy.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, undergirding the Instruction is the modern notion of culture as an integrated and integrating whole, which is also that of Vatican II and of most papal documents, including those of John Paul II.¹⁰¹ Being an instruction on the

⁹⁶ Cfr. n. 20.

⁹⁷ SCDW, “Instruction on the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy” (*Liturgiam Authenticam*) AAS 93 (2001): n. 19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 20.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 107.

¹⁰⁰ Cfr. *Comme le prévoit*, n. 43.

¹⁰¹ Cfr. J.M. Huels, “*Liturgiam Authenticam*: Canonical Observations.” pp. 1-2.

implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Varietates Legitimae* simply assumes Vatican II's concept of culture and offers no discussion, by way of acceptance or rejection, of the extensive developments in the understanding of culture in the last 30 years. It appears not to have been aware of the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity, even though there are concerns that may be described as postmodern.

Perhaps the most striking deficiency in the Instruction is that even though it mentions its preference for “inculturation,” it repeatedly lapses into using “adaptation,” thus perpetuating the older understanding of the process of inculturation.¹⁰² The document does not recognize that the Roman Rite is itself a cultural form, embodying a particular and local way of seeing the world, performing divine worship, and living the Christian faith, especially through its linguistic medium and the theology enshrined in its texts and rituals. By insisting on the necessity of maintaining the substantial unity of the Roman rite in liturgical inculturation, as stipulated by Vatican II, and by holding that “this unity is currently expressed in the typical editions”¹⁰³ the Instruction in practice imposes the Roman/Latin cultural and religious expressions on the other local churches.

Varietates Legitimae clearly does not intend to eliminate cultural differences, as was often done in the pre-Vatican II era; on the contrary, it seeks to maintain and promote the “legitimate differences” of the local churches. But its approach to inculturation lies somewhere between assimilation and control. This control honors cultural differences but insists on some common culture among different ethnic groups, and the culture of the dominant or hegemonic group is imposed on all as such common culture.

¹⁰² Cfr. P. Jeffery, “A Chant Historian Reads *Liturgiam Authenticam*.” p. 342.

¹⁰³ Cfr. *Varietates legitimate*, n. 36.

With regard to popular religion, *Varietates Legitimae* sees it mainly as “popular devotion” or “devotional practices” and decrees that their introduction into liturgical celebrations under the pretext of inculturation cannot be allowed “because by its nature, [the liturgy] is superior to them.”¹⁰⁴ According to the Instruction, it is the duty of the local bishop to organize such devotions, and to purify them, when necessary, because they need to be constantly permeated by the Gospel.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, from the postmodern perspective of popular religion and the contextual theologies of popular religion, the Instruction’s understanding of “popular devotion” is superficial.¹⁰⁶

With regard to the larger issue of the relationship between liturgy and theology, especially in the context of postmodern relativism and pessimism, *Varietates Legitimae* is aware that in many countries, even those with a Christian ethos there exists “a culture marked by indifference or disinterest in religion.”¹⁰⁷ To meet the challenges of this type of culture, the Instruction judges that inculturation is not the appropriate approach since inculturation “assumes there are pre-existent religious values and evangelizes them.”¹⁰⁸ Rather it suggests the use of “liturgical formation” and “finding the most suitable means to reach spirits and hearts.”¹⁰⁹ To dismiss inculturation as an inappropriate means to recover the sense of the sacred in postmodernism because of the alleged lack of “pre-

¹⁰⁴ Cfr. n. 45

¹⁰⁵ Cfr. Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Regarding music and singing, gesture and posture, art and architecture, in general it focuses almost exclusively on the local and popular forms, and is in favor of them, provided that they accord with the sacred character of worship (n. 40) and “are always the expression of the communal prayer of adoration, offering and supplication, and not simply a performance” (n. 42).

¹⁰⁷ n. 8

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Cfr. n. 9.

existent religious values” is a short-sighted policy. Inculturation may turn out to be one of the most suitable means to reach spirits and hearts in postmodernity.¹¹⁰

On the positive side, in spite of the fact that *Varietates Legitimae* seems not have been aware of the challenges of the postmodern understanding of culture, it does contain here and there statements that reflect some of the concerns of postmodernism.¹¹¹ With regard to the choice of cultures into which the liturgy is to be inculturated, the Instruction notes that “in a number of countries, there are several cultures which coexist, and sometimes influence each other in such a way as to lead gradually to the formation of a new culture, while at times they seek to affirm their proper identity, or even oppose each other, in order to stress their own existence.”¹¹² In these places, the Instruction warns, the Episcopal Conference “should respect the riches of each culture and those who defend them, but they should not ignore or neglect a minority culture with which they are not familiar.”¹¹³ In these statements one can hear the echo of the postmodern understanding of culture as a site of struggle and a ground of contest in relations.

From this survey it is clear that Chupungco’s methodology of liturgical inculturation goes far beyond *Varietates Legitimae*. He explicitly states that translations of the typical editions (in acculturation) and adoption of local traditions (in inculturation), though necessary and useful steps, are insufficient and .calls for “liturgical creativity” in

¹¹⁰ Cfr. K.F. Pecklers, *Liturgy in a Postmodern World*, p.69.

¹¹¹ For example, the Instruction explicitly acknowledges the historical evolution of the Roman Rite which has known how to integrate texts, chants, gestures and rites from various sources and to adapt itself in local cultures in mission territories, even if at certain periods a desire for liturgical uniformity obscured this fact (no. 17).

¹¹² n. 49.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

devising new texts and “alternative liturgies” by the local churches.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, though he does not discuss postmodernism as such, Chupungco does address, even though indirectly, some of its challenges. For example, for him inculturation is necessarily an intercultural encounter, and more specifically an encounter between the Roman culture with its patterns of sobriety,¹¹⁵ brevity, directness and practicality, and the culture of another local church with its own distinct, often very different patterns.¹¹⁶ Briefly he warns that power play is at stake in inculturation: “Monoculturalism is often the arm of conquest and domination.” In addition he recognizes the irreplaceable and significant role of popular religion in an adequately inculturated liturgy. Finally, he avers to the existence of contemporary expressions of culture (though not necessarily postmodern) for which the Roman Rite and its typical editions prove largely inadequate.¹¹⁷ Indeed, the result of liturgical inculturation can no longer be the Roman Rite as it currently exists.

In conclusion, in the postmodern age with its manifold challenges to the Christian faith, a truly inculturated liturgy capable of meeting these challenges can no longer be conceived mainly just as a transposition of the Roman Rite with its inherited rituals and centrally composed typical editions, even in the “accommodated” and “inculturated” forms, by way of both “dynamic equivalence” and “creative assimilation.” This method of acculturation or accommodation will be regarded, and rightly so in an age deeply suspicious of power play, as an unjustified imposition of a particular culture with its

¹¹⁴ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, pp. 51-54.

¹¹⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹¹⁶ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Worship: Beyond Inculturation* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1994), pp. 167-175.

¹¹⁷ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, pp.95-102.

patterns and institutions on to another culture and will inevitably fail to respond fully to the needs of the local churches. The starting point of a genuine inculturation must be a vibrant creativity, a new way of being Church, characterized by dialogue, out of which a new ritual family, with its own texts, rites, sacramentals, forms of popular religion, and various expressions of worship will eventually be constituted. Perhaps only in this way is the unity of faith can be preserved and promoted amidst cultural pluralism. This is no revolutionary approach; after all, that is what the Roman Rite did, in its own way.

***C. The Documents and Rites on the Liturgy with Children:
A Model of Liturgical Inculturation and Creativity***

1. The “Culture of Children”

Given the methodology of liturgical inculturation developed after Vatican II, and the process of development of the documents and rites for the celebration of the liturgy with children, it seems appropriate to suggest that there exists a strong parallel between the needs of children as a distinct group within the Church, and the needs of particular cultures, for which liturgical adaptations can and must be made. The adaptation of the liturgy to the needs of children can in this way be viewed as a form of liturgical inculturation. Therefore, the preparation of the DMC, the EPMC, and the LMC can indeed be viewed as a model of liturgical inculturation.¹¹⁸ This process of preparation and approval of the liturgical texts and rites of worship understood children as a particular different “culture.”

In the research, composition, and approval of the documents and rites, the liturgists, pedagogues, psychologists, and experts involved, were challenged to assimilate

¹¹⁸ Cfr. C.V. Johnson, “The Children’s Eucharistic Prayers: A Model of Liturgical Inculturation,” pp. 209-227.

the spirituality, thought, language, gestures, and artistic patterns of children, and to place them in dialogue with the traditional rites of the Church. In this process, direct translation of the *editio typica* was not sufficient; rather, a process of dynamic equivalence was demanded by the “culture of children.”¹¹⁹

The “culture of children,” with its modes of thinking and expression, called for a dynamic equivalence which found new forms of language, gestures, repetition, and simplicity, which were in accordance with children, in order to foster their active participation in the liturgy, in ways that would correspond to their stage of development and that made them worship “in spirit and truth” according to their age.¹²⁰

The liturgical texts and rites were thus inserted into the cultural patterns of children, perhaps going further than just a dynamic equivalence and inculturation, but toward a liturgical creativity process demanded by the nature of the inculturation process. The work on the DMC led to an understanding that new forms and principles of worship, even though in line with tradition, were necessary. Thus it was not correct to just dynamically translate the *editio typica* of the Roman Missal, for example, for the celebration of the Eucharist with children. Rites were simplified, adapted, created, many times independently of the *editiones typicae* that were in vigor for the Roman Rite. By Chupungco’s definition, the documents and rites on children’s liturgy were creative adaptations, that had as a base the *editiones typicae* and the cultural patterns of children, and thus form by definition inculturated liturgies.¹²¹ The authors of the DMC, the EPMC,

¹¹⁹ Cfr. L. Guglielmoni, “Le preci eucaristiche per la messa dei fanciulli. Spunti di riflessione e suggerimenti per la loro utilizzazione,” pp. 57-68.

¹²⁰ Cfr. A. Haguin, «Le Directoire romain pour les messes d’enfants.» *La Maison Dieu* 119 (1974): pp. 112-123.

¹²¹ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation. Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, pp. 51, 89, 169.

and the LMC had to use liturgical creativity so as to make the rites relevant to the culture of children and foster their *actuosa participatio*.

The process of liturgical inculturation of the Eucharist with children was one of the first inculturation efforts that received wide support from different sectors in the Church. A. Bugnini recalls the great number of requests that were made from bishops from all over the world to Pope Paul VI and to the SCDW, asking for an adaptation of the Mass to the needs of children,¹²² in light of the liturgical inculturation mandate offered by the Council.¹²³ The official newsletter of the SCDW reported that: “At the first Synod of Bishops¹²⁴ various bishops speaking on liturgical reform expressed the desire of their respective episcopal conferences for Masses specially adapted to children.”¹²⁵ Even though the initial official reply from the prefect of the SCDW claimed that there was no need of establishing a special rite, that it was just a matter of determining “which elements are to be kept, shortened, or omitted, and to choose more appropriate texts,”¹²⁶ the path undertaken by the Congregation revealed that a simple adaptation was not enough, and that indeed, even though not envisaged at the beginning, a process of liturgical creativity was to be the answer.

After the discussion and work of appointed experts in liturgy, child psychology, spirituality, and pedagogy, and the subsequent consultation with the SCDW and the appointed bishops, the desire to adapt the liturgy to the needs of children expressed by the Synod of Bishops came to fruition with the promulgation of the DMC. The DMC was

¹²² Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975*, p. 446.

¹²³ Cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 38, for “legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples.”

¹²⁴ Celebrated in Rome in 1967.

¹²⁵ See *Notitiae* 3 (1967).

¹²⁶ Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975*, p. 446.

designed to “make provision for a true adaptation of the Eucharistic celebration to the participants in accord with their number, age, spiritual needs, and their character as constituting the actual liturgical assembly.”¹²⁷ Rites were to be simplified and re-envisioned, and new possibilities for worship in the Eucharistic assembly were indeed creatively inculturated. But the DMC acknowledged that the simplification and new possibilities for the *Ordo Missae* were not enough, as new presidential prayers, new lectionaries, and new Eucharistic prayers were found to be necessary to fulfill the road towards the liturgical inculturation of the Mass with children.¹²⁸ The DMC called for new translations of Scripture made specifically for children,¹²⁹ as well as presidential prayers that were adapted or newly composed according to the themes, language, and mentality of children. The DMC also encouraged the active participation of children in the liturgy through verbal expression, use of audiovisual aids, suitable body actions, music and ministries.¹³⁰ And the conflictive topic of new Eucharistic prayers specifically composed for assemblies with children, initially opposed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and by Pope Paul VI himself,¹³¹ made its way through, by evidencing the urgent need of making the summit of the Eucharist accessible to the “culture of children.”¹³²

2. Differences with the Process of Adaptation of Vatican II

As I have already mentioned, officials at the SCDW initially thought that adaptation of the *editiones typicae* would be sufficient to follow the Council’s directives

¹²⁷ Cfr. DMC, n. 4.

¹²⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 51.

¹²⁹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 43.

¹³⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, nn. 35-36.

¹³¹ Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975*, p. 444.

¹³² Cfr. *Praenotanda* to the EPMC.

for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups. Indeed this was the initial curial approach following Vatican II's language of adaptation. But as specialists in liturgy and children examined the *editio typica*, they became ever more conscious of the need to undertake the Council's invitation for a "more radical adaptation of the liturgy"¹³³ and follow the *Consilium's* observation that "the creation of new texts will be necessary."¹³⁴ Initially hesitant officials were then convinced by the experts that "adaptation" was not sufficient for the celebration of a fully renewed liturgy, and instead the creation of new texts and rites would be necessary, in contradiction with Cardinal Lercaro's initial response.¹³⁵

Thus, the process of development of the documents and rites of the liturgy with children diverged somewhat from the initial model of adaptation proposed by Vatican II. This process is evidenced especially in the composition of the EPMC. These Eucharistic prayers, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, followed the following path toward final approval:¹³⁶

- Study of the *editio typica* of the Roman Eucharistic Prayers;
- Study of the "culture" of children: their spirituality, mentality, and idiosyncrasy;
- Composition of new texts in vernacular languages;¹³⁷
- Translation of the first drafts into major world languages;¹³⁸

¹³³ SC, n. 40.

¹³⁴ *Comme le prévoit*, n. 43.

¹³⁵ Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975*, p. 443.

¹³⁶ Cfr. E. Mazza, "Le preghiere eucharistiche per le messe con i fanciulli: Un caso di creatività liturgica," pp. 633-657.

¹³⁷ For the EPMC I, the language of composition was Belgian-Dutch; for EPMC II it was French, and for EPMC III it was German.

¹³⁸ They were translated into four: English, Spanish, Italian, and French.

- Translation of the vernacular language texts into Latin to form a *textus propositivus*;
- Creative development of other vernacular texts based on the Latin by the Bishop's Conferences.

We should note that this process of composition of new liturgical texts, designed to take into account the adaptational needs of children as a distinct group, also provided room for further adaptation of these prayers for children in particular local vernacular contexts, work that was to be done by the national Episcopal conferences.

The whole process of composition and adaptation of the EPMC includes several notable innovations. Perhaps the most important point of departure from the model of adaptation proposed by Vatican II is evidenced in the last step of the process of developing the EPMC outlined above: there was to be a creative development of vernacular texts based on the Latin text.¹³⁹ The Introduction to the EPMC states that “the committee of translators should always remember that in this case the Latin text is not intended for liturgical use. Therefore it is not to be merely translated.”¹⁴⁰ E. Mazza comments on this unprecedented move away from the primacy of Latin as the *editio typica*, writing that in this move is seen “an explicit intention of renewing the entire project and program of liturgical reform by putting an end to the whole regime of ‘liturgy in translation’; and moving instead toward direct composition in the vernaculars.”¹⁴¹

These prayers represent a dramatic change in the way the SCDW approves liturgical texts. Between the two extremes of either translating an official Latin text or improvising a text, in the case of the EPMC, the Church has allowed the path of free

¹³⁹ Cfr. E. Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, pp. 225-249.

¹⁴⁰ Cfr. n. 3.

¹⁴¹ Cfr. E. Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, pp. 238.

creation of a text based on a given model, the *textus propositivus*. The basic Latin text, born in a creative process itself, was offered to the Episcopal Conferences for writing the vernacular language texts of the EPMC; it was a model not intended for liturgical usage. That *textus propositivus* was not to be an *editio typica*, but rather a model whose substance and general form should be followed in the composition of the new texts. It was not intended for literal translation, but rather to provide the inspiration for the composition of the EPMC, task delegated not just to liturgists, but to experts in education, catechesis, literature and music as well.¹⁴²

The new texts were to be accommodated to the culture and idiosyncrasy of the people, and should correspond to the pastoral, pedagogical and liturgical demands of children. This is evidence of not just dynamic equivalence, but of creative assimilation of the linguistic patterns, religious figures, and values in contemporary children's expressions.

From the DMC, the *Praenotanda* to the EPMC, and both the Spanish *Texto Unificado de la Plegaria Eucarística para las misas con niños* and the ICEL English text of the prayers, we can outline some principles, which evidence an understanding of the group for which the liturgical adaptations were made, i.e., the children. These principles are constitutive of certain informed assumptions, suppositions and generalizations with regard to children as a group. These ideas are illustrative of the experts' understanding of what could analogically be called the "culture of children".

I will use the term "culture of children" in an analogical sense because, even though children do not constitute a definite and unique group of equal socio-cultural characteristics, we can certainly identify a particular notion of children and their ways of

¹⁴² Cfr. J.B. Ryan, "Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children."

worshiping, which was identified and assumed in the process of composition of the EPMC. The experts were conditioned by their own cultural settings, as they wrote in a first-world, western European cultural context. In identifying the characteristics of a “culture of children” we have to acknowledge these are not necessarily universally applicable to the diverse broader cultural contexts in which children worship the world over.¹⁴³ It is for this reason that the DMC¹⁴⁴ and Introduction to the EPMC¹⁴⁵ emphasize the necessity for adaptation of these prayers to the local cultural contexts in which children worship. While these documents have attempted to acknowledge the different adaptational needs of children in diverse cultural circumstances, it is not clear that the documents and rites of the liturgy with children will meet all the needs and different practices of children in diverse socio-cultural contexts. These, perhaps, have to be taken into consideration by the local community.

3. *Some principles of the “Culture of Children”*

I will now outline some principles of this “culture of children,” as they are present in the DMC, the EPMC, and the LMC, as well as in the reflection of theologians who have studied the liturgy with children.¹⁴⁶

a) *Children have a different mentality than adults.* The documents on the liturgy with children recognize the different mentality of children as a call for inculturation and adaptation. In the DMC and the LMCIn, the need for adapting to this mentality of children asks, for example, that the homilist have the necessary aptitude and talent to

¹⁴³ Cfr. E. Mazza, “Niños,” in *Nuevo Diccionario de Liturgia* (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1984).

¹⁴⁴ n. 5

¹⁴⁵ nn. 8-11

¹⁴⁶ I am indebted to C.V. Johnson for her presentation on the principles of the “culture” of children. Cfr. “The Children’s Eucharistic Prayers: A Model of Liturgical Inculturation,” *Worship* 75:3 (2001): pp. 209-227.

address the children. It acknowledges that another adult, different from the presiding priest, may speak to the children after the Gospel, “especially if the priest finds it difficult to adapt himself to the mentality of children.”¹⁴⁷

Recognition of the different mentality of children is particularly evident in the decision to move away from direct translation of the Latin *editio typica* of the Eucharistic Prayers to direct composition of EPMC in the vernacular languages based on a proposed model. This was done because features proper to Latin (which never developed a special style of speaking with children) and “the Latin preference for compound sentences, the somewhat ornate and repetitious style, and the so-called *cursus*,” make the language of a direct translation too difficult for children to understand.¹⁴⁸

The understanding that the child’s mode of thought is essentially different than that of the adult is a basic principle. The authors of the EPMC had in mind, for example, when directing that some of the texts of the EPMC never be altered for children “lest the difference between Masses with children and Masses with adults become too great.”¹⁴⁹ We also see this principle at work in the requirement that the words of the Lord in the institution narrative of the EPMC remain exactly the same.¹⁵⁰ According to the *Praenotanda* to the EPMC, the Conferences of Bishops appointed experts familiar not only in liturgy, but also pedagogy, catechetics and music in children’s ministry, with the responsibility of adapting these texts into the vernacular.¹⁵¹

b) *Children need simple language and concepts.* All the documents and rites for the liturgy with children recognize that the “culture of children” is one of simple

¹⁴⁷ See DMC, n. 24.

¹⁴⁸ Cfr. *Praenotanda* to the EPMC, n. 11.

¹⁴⁹ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 2.

¹⁵¹ Cfr. n. 10.

language, in which concepts tend to become concrete rather than abstract, and in which the receiver in the communication process (the child) is of utmost importance. This is evident in the call for a simple language of worship.

The EPMC, for example, even though they contain “all the elements that have always been expressed, for example, in the anamnesis or the epiclesis,”¹⁵² these will be formulated in a simpler style of language, suited to the understanding of children. And, even though a simpler style of language was adopted, the authors always had in mind the importance of avoiding the danger of childish language, which would jeopardize the dignity of the Eucharistic celebration, especially if it affected the words to be said by the celebrant himself.¹⁵³ Language is then simple, but not silly or babyish.

The *Directory* also emphasizes the capacity of children to experience and understand specific simple concepts and values such as “the community activity, exchange of greetings, capacity to listen and to seek and grant pardon, expression of gratitude, experience of symbolic actions, a meal of friendship, and festive celebration.”¹⁵⁴ It also recognizes that different groups of children in different vernacular circumstances have slightly different needs.¹⁵⁵ The composition of different EPMC responded, at the beginning, to the desire to offer alternatives to differences in language or circumstances among children. Originally, bishops were to choose one of the three EPMC for liturgical use in their respective territories, making the selection according to the condition of language.¹⁵⁶ This criterion was later ignored and all three EPMC were approved, recognizing that it was each local community’s responsibility to select the

¹⁵² Cfr. *Praenotanda* to the EPMC, n. 5.

¹⁵³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Cfr. DMC, n. 9.

¹⁵⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 23-25.

¹⁵⁶ Cfr. A. Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975*, pp. 446-447.

appropriate Eucharistic prayer. Each of the EPMC has different emphases to be taken in consideration when making the selection for the celebration.¹⁵⁷

c) *Children need clearly defined structures and relationships.* From the pedagogical and cultural experience with children, it has been demonstrated that children need evident structures and clear relationships, in which communication and development are fostered.¹⁵⁸ In this line, there are various provisions in the documents that favor structures and relationships in the liturgy with children. The DMC states that the purpose of the various elements should always correspond with what is said in the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* on individual points, even if at times for pastoral reasons an absolute identity cannot be insisted upon.¹⁵⁹ The DMC continues:

The general structure of the Mass should always be maintained. Within individual parts of the celebration, the adaptations that follow seem necessary if children are truly to experience, in their own way and according to the psychological patterns of childhood, 'the mystery of faith' by means of rites and prayers.¹⁶⁰

The Introduction to the EPMC underscores the need for children to be aware of the structural elements of the EPMC stating that “before the words *Do this in memory of me* a sentence has been introduced, *Then he said to them*, in order to make clearer for children the distinction between what is said over the bread and wine and what refers to the celebration's being repeated.”¹⁶¹ It notes further that “in preparing these texts, care

¹⁵⁷ For example, EPMC I is a text of greater simplicity; EPMC II provides for greater participation; and EPMC III offers seasonal variations. The selection should have into consideration the language and circumstances of the children in the assembly.

¹⁵⁸ Cfr. J. Piaget, H. Weaver, “The Concrete Operations of Thought and Interpersonal Relationships,” *The Psychology of the Child* (New York, 1996).

¹⁵⁹ Cfr. n. 21.

¹⁶⁰ n. 38.

¹⁶¹ n. 3.

should be taken to ensure the due correlation of their three parts (preface, part after the Sanctus, epiclesis).”¹⁶²

Attention to structure is important so that children can pedagogically learn to follow the celebration. In this regard, the *Praenotanda* state that “in translating these texts careful distinction should be made between the several literary genres that occur in the Eucharistic prayer, namely, the preface, the intercessions, acclamations, etc.”¹⁶³ The DMC suggests that some texts (such as the acclamations, responses and the Lord’s Prayer, responses to priest’s greetings, etc.) should never be adapted so that the difference between the liturgy with children and the one with adults is not too pronounced so as to make the children feel foreign in the adult celebration.¹⁶⁴

In further clarifying the ritual for the mentality of children, the Introduction states that “in view of the psychology of children, it seems better to refrain from concelebration when Mass is celebrated with them.”¹⁶⁵ In this way, the children’s identification of the priest as presider is not confused in view of different concelebrants.

d) *Children respond to the attitudes of adults.* In all cultures, children are taught to respond to the directives of their parents and adult supervisors. They respond to the attitudes and postures they discover in the adults. In the liturgy, from beginning to end, the children are being led by adults. Thus the values expressed in the prayers are values that adults want to pass on to their children.¹⁶⁶ Since the Eucharist is always the action of the entire ecclesial community, the participation of at least some adults is desirable so as

¹⁶² n. 25.

¹⁶³ Cfr. n. 12

¹⁶⁴ n. 39.

¹⁶⁵ n. 22

¹⁶⁶ Cfr. E.A. Ficocelli, “Avoiding Mass Hysteria. Teaching Children to Behave in Church,” *America* 6:5 (2002): pp. 18-21.

to direct and accompany the children. These should be present not as monitors but as participants, praying with the children and helping them to the extent necessary.¹⁶⁷

Regarding the EPMC, they reflect this principle of the “culture of children” in that the prayers were designed to reflect the manner in which adults speak with children about important things. Thus, “the style of the vernacular text is in every aspect to be adapted to the spirit of the respective language as well as to the manner of speaking with children in each language concerning matters of great importance.”¹⁶⁸ The DMC reminds us that “with even greater care than in Masses with adults, the liturgical texts should be proclaimed intelligibly and unhurriedly, with the necessary pauses.”¹⁶⁹ In this way, the importance of the texts will be conveyed to children.

e) *Children have short attention spans.* They are notorious for their short-term concentration. Any teacher will give witness to this principle. The rites for children apply this in trying to maintain words and rites in simplicity and brevity. The short sentence structure of the EPMC and the invitation to follow this simple syntax in the adapted presidential prayers attests to this principle. The EPMC II is a good example, as it retains a simple structure that is not an overly long passage of presidential text read without inviting the response of the children. In the children’s participation in the prayer, through the acclamations, the attention of the children is not given opportunity to stray, as they await their next response.

f) *Children need to be taught the ways and words of worship.* Children need to be taught how to pray and worship. Even in the case of children, the liturgy itself always exerts its own inherent power to instruct. The DMC suggests in its assertion of the

¹⁶⁷ Cfr. DMC, n. 24.

¹⁶⁸ *Praenotanda* to the EPMC, n. 11.

¹⁶⁹ n. 37

pedagogical character of the liturgy, that liturgical catechesis based on the Mass is most important, particularly focusing on the Eucharistic prayers.¹⁷⁰ The Introduction to the EPMC reinforces this principle stating that careful catechetical instruction must precede and follow the celebration.¹⁷¹

An application on the teaching of worship, includes the introduction of directed acclamations. These are facilitated by the use of cantors who invite the children to repeat the acclamations after them, and use cue words to invite the acclamations. These techniques enable children to learn the acclamations via repetition, and to feel secure in joining in at the appropriate point through use of a cue word or phrase.

g) *Children need repetition to fully learn the ways and words of worship.* The documents and rites on the liturgy with children are full of examples on how to apply the principle that children's learning of worship is based upon repetition. Repetition, when pedagogically applied, is a means of instilling in children a cycle of worship. Some examples: The EPMC allows for the responsorial singing of the Sanctus in order to help children to learn it.¹⁷² In EPMC I, the Sanctus is broken into three sung sections, the second of which builds on the first. Both sections are then joined together and repeated as the entire Sanctus is sung. In EPMC II the acclamation "Hosanna in the highest" is repeated four times (one of which concludes the singing of the entire Sanctus); the response "Jesus has given his life for us," is repeated twice and the acclamation "We praise you, we bless you, we thank you," is repeated three times in EPMC II.

¹⁷⁰ Cfr. DMC, n. 12.

¹⁷¹ Cfr. n. 21.

¹⁷² Cfr. Introduction, n. 18.

Also, according to the DMC, before the children are dismissed they need some repetition and application of what they have heard. This repetition is important so that the children discover the connection between the liturgy and life.¹⁷³

h) *Children need interaction to be fully engaged in worship.* Children embody their feelings and thoughts through gestures and movement. This embodiment needs to be evident in worship.¹⁷⁴ In view of the nature of the liturgy as an activity of the entire person and in view of the psychology of children, participation by means of gestures and posture should be strongly encouraged in Masses with children, considering age and local customs. Much depends not only on the actions of the priest, but also on the manner in which the children conduct themselves as a community.¹⁷⁵

The DMC, remembers that if in accord with the norm of the GIRM¹⁷⁶ a conference of bishops adapts the congregation's actions at Mass to the mentality of a people, it should take the special condition of children into account or should decide on adaptations that are for children only.

The DMC allows for the use of visual elements and children's artwork to facilitate their participation.¹⁷⁷ Also, because the principles of active participation are in some respects even more significant for children, the number of acclamations in the EPMC has been increased, in order to expand an embodied participation that is more effective. The DMC encourages strongly the participation of as many children as possible by helping in preparing the place and the altar, acting as cantor, singing in a choir, playing musical

¹⁷³ Cfr. DMC, n. 54.

¹⁷⁴ Cfr. J. Gallet, "Bodily-based Imagination and the Liturgical Formation of Children," pp. 113-126.

¹⁷⁵ Cfr. DMC, n. 33.

¹⁷⁶ Cfr. GIRM, n. 21.

¹⁷⁷ Cfr. DMC, n. 35.

instruments, proclaiming the readings, responding during the homily, reciting the intentions of the general intercessions, bringing the gifts to the altar and performing similar activities in accord with the usage of various peoples. To encourage participation, it will sometimes be helpful to have several additions, for example, the insertion of motives for giving thanks before the priest begins the dialogue of the preface.¹⁷⁸

i) *Children respond well to musical expression to help engage them in worship.*

Throughout the different cultures, children's songs are an important educational tool. Lullabies and children play-songs are ubiquitous to all cultures. The liturgy should reflect this reality. The DMC recognizes that singing must be given great importance in all celebrations, but it is to be especially encouraged in every way for Masses celebrated with children, in view of their special affinity for music. If possible, the acclamations should be sung by the children rather than recited, especially the acclamations that form part of the Eucharistic prayer.¹⁷⁹

The use of "musical instruments can add a great deal" in Masses with children, especially if they are played by the children themselves.¹⁸⁰ The playing of instruments will help sustain the singing or to encourage the reflection of the children. Instruments can easily express for children festive joy and the praise of God.

j) *Children are essentially self-focused.* A last principle of this "culture of children" is evident in the children's "subjective centering."¹⁸¹ This last principle is only

¹⁷⁸ Cfr. Ibid., n. 22.

¹⁷⁹ Cfr. Ibid., n. 30.

¹⁸⁰ Cfr. Ibid., n. 32.

¹⁸¹ Piaget concludes in this respect: "If we compare the preoperatory subperiod between two and seven or eight with the subperiod of completion between seven or eight and eleven or twelve, we see the unfolding of a long, integrated process that may be characterized as a transition from subjective centering in all areas to a decentering that is at once cognitive, social, and moral." Thus, education and development are a process of transition from subjective centering to social

implicitly acknowledged in the documents and rites for children. It is present in the EPMC who use expressions centered on the child: “Lord, you never forget any of your children.”¹⁸² “Blessed be Jesus, whom you sent to be the friend of children and the poor.”¹⁸³ Named specifically in the texts of the EPMC, children are offered the opportunity to appropriate these prayers as their own. These references to children reinforce the nature of children as self-focused and as a separate group from the rest of the worshipping assembly. But also, having children as dialogue partners with the priest in the Eucharistic prayer gives importance to the children. Children are much more engaged by something which they perceive to be at least in part their own. Hence, by giving them the opportunity to become active and essential dialogue partners with the presider in the EPMC, children are offered the chance to appropriate their role in the Eucharistic prayer.

The documents and rites for the liturgy with children represent an important precedent in the historical development of the liturgy of the Church. They opened a door for liturgical inculturation and creativity. They are a model of liturgical inculturation in which a dynamic interaction between the Roman *editio typica* and a local “culture” resulted in the development of a new liturgical form. These liturgical texts and rites have to come into being directly in the living language themselves, where account is taken of the need to adapt the liturgy and incarnate it in the cultures and diverse situations of the local churches. The DMC, the EPMC, and the LMC have introduced a new situation from the juridical standpoint and in regard to liturgical methodology. “Creativity based

interaction. Cfr. J. Piaget, H. Weaver, “The Concrete Operations of Thought and Interpersonal Relationships,” p. 128.

¹⁸² EPMC I.

¹⁸³ EPMC II.

on tradition” if adopted for the most important part of the liturgy must itself become an accepted practice in other parts of the celebration.¹⁸⁴ The principle of liturgical creativity within tradition has a historically significant example in the *Directory* and the *Anaphoras* for Masses with children.¹⁸⁵ It witnesses to the importance of culture and inculturation in today’s worship.

In a world debating between modern and postmodern concepts of culture, and in a Church challenged with different understandings and methods of liturgical inculturation, the process of liturgical creativity envisioned in the texts and rites of the liturgy with children, proposes a true model for inculturation for the Church. An inculturation that will be a creative, constructive, dialogical process, in a world confronted with multicultural and power struggles.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. E. Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, p. 238.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. E. Mazza, “Le preghiere eucaristiche per le messe con i fanciulli: Un caso di creatività liturgica,” p. 633.

VI. TOWARDS AN INCULTURATED PASTORAL LITURGICAL MODEL: CONTRIBUTIONS FOR A RENEWED PRAXIS

A. A Practical Liturgical Theology of Children

A central feature of practical theology as a discipline and as a method for doing theological work is praxis or the mutual engagement of theory and practice for the sake of transformation of reality. That is, practical theology as a praxis-centered theology intends to be put to work in the lives, communities, and situations of people. It is not a theology centered on abstract questions asked as some form of academic exercise with no engagement in the real lives of people. Practical theology involves strategies and tactics of transformation.¹

This is why this model of a practical liturgical theology for the celebration of the Eucharist with children is a way of doing theology that begins with the local context, its liturgical praxis, and the lives of children in the Catholic Schools of Puerto Rico, as they seek to be welcomed by Jesus. As a practical theologian I have examined that context and the liturgical praxis of several Catholic schools in Puerto Rico, always having in mind the specific children that inspire this project. But having examined that first praxis, the persons and situations, i.e. the children, schools, and celebrations, it has been necessary to engage the theoretical perspectives of theology, spirituality, pedagogy, culture, and the liturgy, in an effort to weave what I have called a practical liturgical theology of children that can generate creative, constructive actions.

The goals of this practical liturgical theology of children are not about creating new abstract principles or theological doctrines. The intention toward which this practical

¹Cfr. M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

theology is oriented is the transformation of the liturgical praxis with children in the particular context of the Catholic schools of Puerto Rico. In this chapter, I intend to offer practical strategies for the Catholic school community to engage in transforming liturgical practices with children in the celebration of the Eucharist in the Island.

Practical theologians claim, as Don Browning puts it, “that Christian theology should be seen as practical through and through and at its very heart.”² What does this mean for a practical liturgical theology of children? This theology cannot exist simply at the level of ideas. Practical theology must be a practice, and a practical liturgical theology of children must represent a way of creating Eucharistic communities in which children are welcomed and valued. From that viewpoint, a practical liturgical theology of children becomes a way of doing a practical theological anthropology. It names and enacts the meaning of human life in connection with God from the perspective of a theological understanding of childhood and calls forth actions toward the welcoming of children in the Eucharistic celebration in which they are made full participants, according to their stage of development and local culture.

The current liturgical praxis in many Catholic schools in Puerto Rico has become a praxis that erases children’s participation or otherwise marginalizes them in an expression of the generalized societal disregard for the religious potential of children. The shape of our liturgical practices with children matters because this praxis constitutes the site where the ritual enactment of what we understand of the children and of the Eucharistic assembly. Hopefully, the Holy Spirit will enable us to remember that “whoever welcomes a child welcomes Jesus,” even in the face of liturgical and social practices that fail to fully welcome children at the Eucharist. God’s action provides

² D.S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 7.

grounds for hope that our personal and social transformation can take place, in order to enable the full, conscious, and active participation of children in the liturgy, and through those liturgical practices with them, to plant the seeds of the reign of God in our own cultural and social context.

What, then, does my study of the theology, spirituality, and psychology of childhood, as well as culture and liturgical methodology, have to contribute to a renewed understanding of our liturgical practices with children? How does the theory illumine the current praxis, so as to claim a new liturgical practice? I will now propose some principles for a transformative practical liturgical theology of children and then present a list of strategies for a renewed praxis that takes the inculturation of the Eucharist with children in Puerto Rico seriously.

1. Some Basic Principles

a) The liturgical practices of the celebration of the Eucharist with children have much to contribute to a transformative Christian praxis of the Catholic schools of Puerto Rico. They are constitutive practices for the entire school community. In the Puerto Rican Caribbean context, full of *ritmo y energía*, of *música y sabor*, the American consumer capitalism also plays an important role. In the middle of this reality, a renewed liturgical praxis with children should involve the telling of an alternative story to the dominant narrative of the market society that tries to permeate the context of the Caribbean cultural reality that constitutes Puerto Rican society. A renewed praxis, embedded in the local culture and open to alternative stories, will have the potential for transformation and for proposing liberatory ways of constructing meaning among those who participate in them.

Inculturated liturgical practices with children will give light to a life of Christian commitment as well as a transformative educational process.

b) While the liturgical life and the concrete liturgical praxis with children in the Catholic school communities are a part of the whole spectrum of Christian practices, reforms of the liturgical praxis will not encompass the totality of Christian life,³ for they cannot become a substitute for action to change the injustices faced by children in their daily lives or intend to solve all problems in the school community. So the liturgical praxis has to be in correlation with the other practices of Christian life enriching the community. The critical correlation of liturgy and ethics, of worship and justice, is part of the critical reciprocity between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*, as well as between the *orthodoxia* and *orthopraxis*. The liturgy becomes the place of transformation, which sends forth the community to a practice that is coherent with the values proclaimed and celebrated in the Eucharist.

The *Constitution on the Liturgy* states that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”⁴ The liturgy moves the faithful, filled with “the paschal sacraments,” into the compelling love of Christ and sets them on fire.⁵ In the liturgy, therefore, and especially in the Eucharist, all the activities of the Church, including the education of children, find meaning and strength.

³ Cfr. SC 9, which states: “The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion: ‘How then are they to call upon him in whom they have not yet believed? But how are they to believe him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear if no one preaches? And how are men to preach unless they be sent?’ (Rom. 10:14-15).”

⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 10.

⁵ Cfr. *Idem.*

There is certainly a strange paradox here. Liturgical practices simultaneously do make a real difference – God transforms us with the liturgy – and yet the liturgy cannot be seen as the only way for reforming Christian life and society. This tension, recalled by Vatican Council II, is at work at the Catholic school community. The educational community should have the Eucharist as its font and summit, welcome all of God’s children at the Communion table, and discover at the same time that in the Eucharist it will find strength to go forth to fulfill the Gospel message of evangelization. Liturgy and social justice are not in confrontation; they are both part of Christian life.

c) Third, all persons, including children, are formed in faith through the community’s praxis in the liturgy. Therefore the Catholic school community and their leaders need to honestly analyze if their liturgical practices are truly embedded in their own cultural context in a true spirit of welcoming of children, or if they are organized around the inherited practices of times past and non-relevant cultural models. The school community needs to be alert that it is not “misrecognizing” what happens in the liturgical praxis as being “in the best interests of the children.” The school faith communities would do well to recognize that their liturgical practices with children can function as sites to reimagine and reconfigure the social positioning of children in ways that enact God’s justice for children and contribute to their thriving together with adults.⁶

d) Another important principle for a transformative praxis is that the Puerto Rican Catholic school community has to rediscover the celebration of the liturgy with children as a gift from God.

⁶ J.A. Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), p. 12.

In my reading of literature on children in the liturgy, I noticed that most of the emphasis rests on children as receivers of whatever worship has to offer. The focus on what children gain from worship maintains a unidirectional movement from adults to children. It implicitly suggests that the only ones affected by children's presence in liturgy are the children themselves. Working from a liberatory practical liturgical theology of children suggests a different perspective. In the worship life of faith communities, children are not merely receivers of the worship organized by adults. They are not present in liturgy as mere consumers. Rather, children are a true gift from God, a blessing offered to the community and a sign of God's presence for the community who follows Jesus. The community achieves this whenever that community puts first those who are the least among them. Children give the community an opportunity to live out their true transforming Christian identity by accepting children as opportunities for welcoming God rather than centering on acquisition and consumption.

Not everyone will recognize such opportunities as the gifts that they are. After all, the presence and full participation of children in the Eucharist can destabilize the traditional liturgical *ordo* of a community. But it is precisely this rupture from the traditional practice that constitutes the gift children are for a community. If a community can welcome and celebrate the presence of children, sharing in their *ritmo* and *energía*, they will be open to the many presences of Christ found not just in the liturgy but in the living of Christian love.

The presence of children in the liturgy and their active participation, with their physicality and movement, has the potential to teach adults that their liturgy, too, is an embodied experience of worship. Children need to move their bodies, and they do so,

even in the liturgy. José, Rosa, Pablo, and María – the children I met during my research in the different schools – were evidence of the children’s physical response to worship. The pleasure they take in movement, in “playing” with their bodies for God, can help to teach adults of the need they also have to worship with their whole selves. Children experience worship in a more attentive and engaged mode of participation when more senses than just that of hearing are used. At times music and gestures become a natural response in worship. And adults, teachers and parents, have to rediscover this importance of the body in worship, as they are so many times unaware of their own needs of embodiment in the liturgy.

Children also have the power to evoke the religious affections and imaginations of their parents and other adults. Teachers and parents can be powerfully moved by children’s presence and participation in worship. In interviews, adults identified an important way that gathering children in front for a children’s homily operates for the community. It renders the children visible. In their visibility they become symbols of some deep sense of connection and community for which these adults yearn. The power of children to represent important concepts infused with theological meaning is also a gift children bring to the congregations in which they participate.

2. Strategies for Transforming Liturgical Practices with Children Through Inculturation in the Local Context

In a previous chapter, I explained how Anscar J. Chupungco described liturgical inculturation as the process whereby the texts and rites used in worship are inserted in the framework of the local culture, absorbing its thought, language and ritual patterns.⁷ This process is another legitimate goal for a practical liturgical theology of children in the

⁷ A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, p. 29.

Puerto Rican context, as the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic schools of the Island tries to assimilate the children's thought, language, value, ritual, symbolic and artistic patterns.⁸

The *Directory for Masses with Children* recognized on a realistic note the need for this inculturation:

Although the vernacular may now be used at Mass, still the words and signs have not been sufficiently adapted to the capacity of children. We may fear spiritual harm if over the years children repeatedly experience things in the Church that are scarcely comprehensible to them. The Church follows its Master, who 'put his arms around the children... and blessed them' (Mark 10:16). It cannot leave children in the condition described.⁹

The Eucharistic celebrations studied in the first praxis of this project, including the *Misa de Niños* at Colegio Calasanz, which tried to incorporate some cultural values and give more participation to the children that what was given in the other schools, are all evidence of the need for a profound inculturation process in the spirit of the recommendations of the documents and rites on the celebration of the liturgy with children.

What strategies involving the Catholic school communities' liturgical practices with children could contribute to children thriving in the Church and in Puerto Rico? What contributions can we share towards a renewed praxis in the celebration of the Eucharist with children that will foster full, conscious, and active participation, embedded in the local culture, and tending toward educational and Christian transformation?

There are many challenges ahead, in the road of fully inculturating the liturgy in the setting of Puerto Rican Catholic schools. Inculturation is a live process, as culture

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 30.

⁹ Nn. 1-3.

itself is an ever-growing reality, intrinsically opposed to a static conception of life. Life is ever changing, and thus culture is always growing and developing. For this reason, there will always remain aspects to be explored, deepened, and investigated, before they can be attempted at inculturation. The following contributions are an attempt to list some practical liturgical strategies for a renewed praxis that will truly welcome children and make them true participants in a liturgy that reflects the Puerto Rican cultural context.

a) Relevance of Human Values

One of the things that was inferred from the observation of the liturgical celebrations with children in the different schools is the importance that basic human values have in the liturgy. There needs to be an anthropological approach to the liturgy in which children are introduced in worship through texts and rites, attitudes and gestures that gradually foster human values.¹⁰

The liturgy, as well as the catechetical preparation previous to the celebration, presupposes an idea of God and the supernatural, as well as a basic experience of human values, in proportion to the age of children and their degree of maturity as persons.¹¹ Some of these values are a substratum of the Eucharistic celebration and, when particularly evidenced, help children grow in their comprehension: acting together as community, exchanging greetings, the capacity to listen, to forgive and to ask for forgiveness, the expression of gratitude, the experience of symbolic actions, conviviality and festive celebration.

The presence of these signs in the celebration of the Eucharist in the Catholic schools of Puerto Rico will help the children to cultivate an appreciation of basic human

¹⁰ See: M. Filippi. "Il Direttorio nella luce della pedagogia catechistica." *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): 640-657.

¹¹ This is a goal in the DMC itself. Cfr. n. 9.

values that will keep pace with their age and their psychological and social condition and will help them develop a mature liturgical spirituality.¹²

b) Roles and Ministries

In Masses celebrated with children the principles of active and conscious participation are if anything of even greater validity.¹³ The efforts of adapting the celebration of the Eucharist with children should give great importance to the roles children play in the celebration in order to promote this active participation.

It is necessary to remember that the liturgical assembly – the *synaxis* – encompasses everyone present. The presider is one member of the assembly. The reader, the musicians and the ministers of Communion are members of the assembly. The assembly is the body of Christ, the Church, gathered together. The liturgy that we do together requires that some members of the assembly do this or that special service for the whole assembly. The presider at the Mass is one ordained to exercise this leadership, this presidency of the assembly. But the presider is first of all just one of the baptized, a member of the assembly. Other members of the *synaxis*, because they have special gifts and have received training in the use of these gifts, will take on special tasks. But all the tasks are so that the whole assembly can celebrate the liturgy.

The celebration of the liturgy with children should integrate the participation of children in different ministries. They can be in charge of introductions, of prayers (in the penitential rite, the prayer of the faithful, before the preface and before Communion). Other children can participate in the different processions (entrance, Gloria, Gospel and presentation of the gifts) and in possible theatrical presentations after the proclamation of

¹² Cfr. *Idem*.

¹³ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 22.

the Gospel. Children can also participate as altar servers. And not just the boys, as was the practice in one of the schools visited! But ministries are not just relegated to the roles exercised by those children, as the participation of other children throughout the liturgy (e.g. in the homily) plays an important part in the celebration.

Children should participate in every way according to their gifts. Sharing the gift that the Spirit has given to each one for the sake of “building up the Body” is the essence of all Christian ministry, liturgical and otherwise. The diversity of ministries present in this celebration is evidence that the Mass is not a celebration belonging just to the presider, but to a community with a variety of gifts.¹⁴

But if children are to fulfill any of the ministries, they must be qualified to do so. The job of the reader is not simply to be passed from one to another in alphabetical order. For each ministry, certain skills are necessary and much practice is required. The variety of ministries makes it nearly certain that every child can be trained in some ministry. Yet liturgy consistently celebrated well will show everyone that simply being a member of the assembly is the most dignified and demanding role of all. Those who preside or do the readings or play music or take on any special tasks at all will always be expected to show in their expression and their participation that they are first and last good members of the assembly.

Sometimes it will be better that adults exercise some of the ministries, such as leader of song. It still holds true: first and last, the adult is a member of the assembly. The DMC has a strong point to make about any adults who are present for Masses with children: these should be present not as monitors but as participants.¹⁵ No spectators are

¹⁴ See the *Directory*, n. 22, and SC, n. 28.

¹⁵ Cfr. DMC, n. 24.

allowed at our liturgy. When adults minister, it is all the more important that they prepare well for their special role and practice with other ministers as necessary so that the liturgy does not become a performance.

c) The Role of the Presider

If participation of the children and the involvement of different ministries are significant in the celebration it is also true that the role of the presider is of utmost importance. There is no denying that the DMC places rather heavy demands on the presider. Those demands are not unreasonable but should be understood as long-term goals or ideals that can help the presider improve his presidential and ministerial style across the board.¹⁶

The *Directory* states that it is the responsibility of the priest who presides with children to make the celebration festive, familial, and meditative. Even more than in Masses with adults, the priest is the one to create this kind of attitude, which depends on his personal preparation and his manner of acting and speaking with others. The priest should be concerned, above all, about the dignity, clarity and simplicity of his actions and gestures. In speaking to the children he should express himself so that he will be easily understood, while avoiding any childish style of speech.¹⁷

Even though one might be a great presider, one has the responsibility of always setting aside time for careful preparation of the celebration. This preparation will be most fruitful if done in conversation with the catechists, musicians, or other people in charge of different ministries. This is certainly a demanding task that not only takes time but exposes the presider's own vulnerability to the evaluation of other people in the

¹⁶ J. Patano Vos. *Unpacking the Directory for Masses with Children*, p. 86.

¹⁷ Cfr. n.. 23.

community. But this spiritual vulnerability is also part of the gifts that children bring to us, so a priest involved in children's ministry should himself accept the vulnerability of setting himself in front of other people in the community to accept their comments, suggestions and evaluation.

It is clear that local clergy in Puerto Rico have to receive some formation regarding the celebration of the Eucharist with children, as most of the priests ignore the existence of the DMC, and have not received adequate training for presiding the liturgy with children. This is especially important for those priests serving as pastors in Catholic schools. Perhaps an initial step toward the formation of the clergy in this area would be the preparation of some materials that the catechists or liturgy committees in Catholic schools can give to priests in order to coordinate efforts for the celebration of the Eucharist in the spirit of Vatican II, the documents on children's liturgy, and the needs for local inculturation.

d) The Word of God as a Foundation

In all the celebrations of the liturgy I visited, the Word of God had its importance. But perhaps the treasures of Scripture were not open for all children to understand, as the use of traditional lectionaries and the *ordo* of the Liturgy of the Word in the parish setting prevailed.

The DMC notes that the Word of God is central to the celebration of the liturgy with children. The DMC also notes that length of the readings is not the criterion to be used in deciding on a reading but rather the "spiritual advantage that the reading can bring to the children."¹⁸ This attention to the readings is by way of underlining their immense importance to our liturgy. The introductory rites achieve their purpose when an

¹⁸ Cfr. n. 44.

assembly of children can sit down to listen to Scripture. The Word that is read is read not for study and not for the edification of individuals, but it is read for the Church. We listen as the Church. These are the words we build on, the foundation. When they are brushed aside because something else is on the agenda of the day, when they go unheard because the reader was not prepared or the sound system was not working or the delivery was too fast, when there are complex readings or complicated lectionaries are used, then we are left foundationless. There is nothing for us to stand on.

Without a foundation, how are the children to participate, to celebrate Eucharist, to go out and live? For every liturgy, great effort must go into the preparation of the Liturgy of the Word. Whether child or adult, the expectation is the same: prepare the readings, some real rehearsal and critique, prayer, delivery that draws attention not to itself but only to the word. Because this is difficult to achieve even with the simple situation of a single reader, it should not be assumed easily or often that the readings can best be handled by groups or with special dramatic settings.

The readings in the celebration with children may be reduced but Scripture must always be read.¹⁹ There may be only two readings, even on a feast day, or even only one (in which case it must be from the Gospel). Assigned readings from the Lectionary may be shortened or other Scripture readings may be substituted if the assigned readings would not be helpful for the children. The *Directory* is clear that the readings at Masses with children are not to be paraphrases of Scripture but rather translations that have been prepared especially for use with children.

The *Directory* also suggests that the conferences of bishops prepare a version of the Lectionary especially for Masses with children. In this regard the reality of the current

¹⁹ See numbers 41-49 for the *Directory's* lengthy treatment of this subject.

liturgical praxis of Puerto Rico is behind other places, where adapted *Lectionaries* for Masses with children appeared years ago. As I have pointed out, the current practice of using the *Leccionario* for Mass, prepared by the Conference of Bishops of Spain, does not foster the understanding of Scripture by the children. Even though the use of the *Leccionario para las misas con niños* from Spain is to be preferred to the adult *Leccionario*, it still does not conform to the Puerto Rican Spanish language pattern and thus poses a barrier for children's understanding of the Word. The preparation of a Puerto Rican or at least a Caribbean *Leccionario* for such Masses is an urgent need in children's ministry.²⁰

e) *Presidential Prayers*

One of the most noted aspects of the *Ordo* of the celebration with children is the adaptation of the presidential prayers. The texts for the presidential prayers, even though taken originally from the *Roman Missal* may be adapted to the specific assembly of children, following the principles of the DMC and the methods of liturgical inculturation.

The *Directory* recognizes that selecting from officially approved prayers in the *Missal* may not be sufficient to have prayers that fully express the life and religious experience of children.²¹ In this case, the prayer texts of the *Roman Missal* may be adapted to the needs of the children "but the purpose and substance of these prayers should be preserved, and one should avoid anything that is alien to the literary genre of a

²⁰ Given printing costs and the complex process of preparing a Lectionary, an alternative proposal could be that the Conferences of Bishops of Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Cuba could work on a common *Leccionario para las misas con niños*.

²¹ Cfr. N. 51.

presidential prayer, such as a moral exhortation or excessively childish forms of prayer.”²²

Thus, the Church officially allows the presiding priest to adapt the prayers, recognizing that a particular assembly influences the way the liturgy must be celebrated. This is an adaptation that is far from being implemented in the majority of celebrations of the Eucharist for children in Puerto Rico, and perhaps it is an element that has to be pointed out in the permanent formation of the local clergy.

The process of adaptation of the prayers must respect the basic substance of the original prayer and apply certain methodological tools. Dynamic equivalence will be the most useful method in adapting the prayers to the children’s assembly. In this method, as we noted in the chapter on culture, an element of the Roman liturgy is replaced with something in the local children’s culture that has an equal meaning or value.²³ By its application in children’s liturgy the linguistic, ritual and symbolic elements of the Roman liturgy are expressed following the particular pattern of thought, speech and ritual of children. The result is, as A.J. Chupungco states, a liturgy whose language, rites, and symbols admirably relate to the community of worship, as they evoke experiences of life, human values, traditions, images, of importance in the lives of the assembly.²⁴

As was noted in the observations of the liturgy with children in the schools visited during the research, prayers need to be simplified, and abstract theological concepts need to be eliminated, in favor of terms more relevant to children. A language more easily understood by children is to be preferred. While preserving most of the substance of the original prayer, the adapted texts will be more accessible to the children.

²² Ibid.

²³ A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity and Catechesis*, p. 37.

²⁴ Cfr. Ibid., p. 38.

In the case of the Eucharistic Prayer, we should remember that the Church has already provided approved texts that, while respecting the traditional genre of the anaphora and its theological content, follow a simple linguistic style and language, adapted to children. These EPMC composed for congregations where children form a majority of the worshiping community are the fruit of the principle of adaptation, as well as inculturation, taken to its logical conclusion. They are mostly unknown to catechists in Puerto Rico, and even though presiders may know of their existence in the Missal, the Prayers remain mostly unused.

Another important aspect regarding the EPMC is the inclusion of modifications in the traditional style of the Eucharistic Prayer, so as to favor the children's comprehension and participation. The principal modification is the addition of a good number of acclamations "to render the Eucharistic Prayers more alive and profound" but maintaining the presidential style of the Prayer.²⁵ These acclamations are primarily meant to be sung by the children.

The acclamations of the children during the Eucharistic Prayers are an instrument to foster the active participation of the assembly. The impact of such acclamations was presented at the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist, in October 2005, and was finally accepted as a formal proposition to Pope Benedict XVI. The proposition reads as follows: "The Eucharistic Prayers could be enriched with acclamations, not only after the consecration but in other moments, as provided in the Eucharistic Prayers for celebrations with children and as is done in several countries."²⁶ It is then foreseeable that in the

²⁵ Praenotanda, "Preces eucharisticae pro Missis cum pueris," *Notitiae* 11 (1975): 7-12. n. 7.

²⁶ XI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "List of Propositions," *L'Osservatore Romano* 10:23 (2005).

future more possibilities for acclamations will be permitted or introduced within the structure of the traditional Eucharistic Prayers.

The use of these acclamations and the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with children is still something to be discovered in the context of children's liturgies in Puerto Rico. Its use will ask for formation of presiders and catechists, as well as children, who will need to learn the use of the acclamations to foster their participation in the Eucharistic Prayer. Formation and catechesis will be required for clergy, catechists, and also the children.

f) Posture

Aidan Kavanagh has pointed out the changes that pews – which were added to places of worship only relatively recently – did to the liturgy.²⁷ He explains that pews made the participants at the liturgy into an audience, lining the assembly up and sitting people down. They put the assembly in rows and lined up the rows, just like a theater.

Even when we are in a space without pews, we seem to carry the pews with us. We have not learned how physical the liturgy is, how much movement and space it requires. The liturgy is a dance, an order of motions. And the prime mover/moved is the assembly. And this can be easily identified in celebrations of the Eucharist with children.

Posture is the first part of this embodiment of worship. The liturgy is an embodied experience, in which body postures – sitting, standing, kneeling, moving – are all expressions of this “dance.” These are not meaningless directions to be followed. Part of getting the liturgy into our whole being, making it our own, knowing it by heart, is letting posture be quite natural. Thus, sitting is a position for listening and for reflecting; it is

²⁷ Cfr. A. Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 21.

receptive, comfortable. And standing is a position for action, for attention and for respect. Kneeling is a position of adoration and of contrition.

With children as with adults, the posture should flow from attention to the liturgy and not from a spoken direction: "Please stand." Sometimes the cantor or presider may need to indicate an invitation to rise with a gesture of the arms, but when the liturgy comes to belong to the assembly, even that sort of direction will seldom be necessary, even for the children.

In the celebration of the Eucharist with children, it is even more important for the presider and other ministers to model these postures well. How one sits or stands or kneels matters. Children can learn that postures at liturgy are not just arbitrary. In catechesis, a classroom discussion, or even in a homily there is time to reflect: What does it mean to stand? What does it mean to kneel or to sit? What is the attitude that the local culture conveys toward these postures and what is our attitude? Those who prepare liturgies for children need to be attentive to the matter of posture. And in the context of Puerto Rican children, where movement is so important, the attention to body postures, and formation in the meaning of postures in prayer will be an important tool in attending to this aspect of liturgical embodiment.

g) Gestures

In this same line of having regard for the nature of the liturgy as an action of the whole person and with particular reference to the spirituality and psychology of children, participation through gestures and movement is discovered as an important part of Masses with children.²⁸ The DMC invites to keep in mind the age of the children and the

²⁸ Cfr. DMC, n. 33.

dictates of local custom.²⁹ Gestures and movements should then be adopted in accordance with the mentality of the people. These directives are being ignored in most celebrations of the liturgy with children in Puerto Rico.

Bodily attitudes are important throughout the celebration (e.g. positions before and during prayer). Gestures play an important role during singing. The “dance” that is any liturgy is done by everyone. Those who take roles as presider, cantor, lector or minister of Communion have to move and use gestures. These must never be simply casual and offhand actions, nor should they come out of artificial piety. Difficult as it is in our culture, liturgy would have us move with reverence: being at home in our bodies in the presence of the Lord and one another. We do not move and act here in a different way for the sake of being different. Rather, the way we move and act here is some brief vision of how we would have ourselves be all the time. The reverent way we treat this Bread and this Wine, this Book and this Human Being, is just exactly the way we say God’s reign is to be. It is that reign we try to bring day by day in the ways we act with things and one another.

This means that for all ministers, adults and children, practicing alone and rehearsing together are important. This does not make liturgy a performance. On the contrary, this is the only thing that can keep it from being a performance. Only when the ministers can move at ease because they are so certain and so trained in doing their work well will they become “transparent.”

The carrying of the book of Gospels, the swinging of a censer, the cantor’s gesture to begin singing, the Gospel reader’s kissing of the Book, the presider’s open arms for prayer, the Communion minister’s offering of Bread or Cup – all such ordinary

²⁹ Cfr. Ibid.

gestures, as well as simply walking and standing, should be done well as a matter of course. These are the small things without which the liturgy will never become the work of the assembly.

The assembly, too, has its gestures: the sign of the cross at beginning and end, the cross on forehead and lips and heart at the Gospel, the bowing of the head during two lines of the Creed, the greeting of peace, the extended hands for Communion. Each of these can and should be the matter for reflection and even practice. Many gestures have a rich tradition and are capable of contributing to a worthy liturgy with children.

Traditional gestures in the liturgy need to be rediscovered and need to be taught to children.³⁰ In this way children will value the gestures present in the adult community celebration. But in their own children's liturgy there is ample space for more gestures, in line with their age and the local culture. This is why the DMC foresees the possibility of adding gestures and movement throughout the celebration with children. And here we find a space for active embodiment in the Puerto Rican context. With the children's *ritmo y energía*, with their *música y sabor*, we know it will be easy to make them participate through their bodily attitudes and movement. Catechists need to enter into dialogue with educators, liturgists, and musicians, so as to develop patterns of embodiment, with gestures and movement, which will enrich the singing, the acclamations, and responses throughout the liturgy in the Puerto Rican cultural context.

h) Processions

Processions are also part of the embodiment of the liturgy. And it is important to analyze the way we have processions in the celebration of the Eucharist with children.

³⁰ Cfr. J. Gallet, "Bodily-based Imagination and the Liturgical Formation of Children," *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (2000): 113-126.

We begin with an entrance procession. That is not necessarily the procession of the presider and other ministers through the assembly. The entrance procession is first of all the assembly's procession into the place of worship.

In children's liturgy, it is important to study how the assembly assembles. Is there care taken that the place be entered with some sense for what we are going to do here? Too often we are satisfied simply to get the children in place in whatever way, then "begin." This was observed in the celebrations of all the schools visited.

It is then important to realize that a procession has already begun when the children start toward moving toward the place of worship, be it the parish church, the school gym or chapel. That is the first procession in the liturgy. What attention goes to it? In the school setting and perhaps in some special occasion, it may be possible that this be a true procession including singing and ordered movement from classrooms to church.

Within the Liturgy of the Word, we also have another procession: the Gospel procession in which special honor is paid to the Gospel reading, a procession made possible by the Alleluia-singing assembly. This was observed in the liturgy at Colegio Calasanz. Even if it consists only of the presider moving toward the Book of Gospels, it is a true procession. In this movement, we are all moving slowly, with excitement, with praise and awe toward the words of the Gospel. There has to be room for that in the way the assembly celebrates the Liturgy of the Word with children. If, on feasts, children bring candles and incense as part of this procession, and if the Book is held high and carried into the midst of the assembly, then we manifest and discover even more of what our lifelong procession is about.

Another procession that is of importance in the liturgy with children is the one that brings the gifts of bread and wine to the Table. Children can participate in bringing the gifts to altar, and appropriate gestures can be added to make possible the participation of the children's assembly. Other things prepared especially by the children, that are expression of their work and that they wish to offer in the liturgy, can very appropriately be incorporated into the procession, as long as they are an expression of the "work of our hands," or the offering of the children to God or the poor. At this moment, the liturgy calls for the Table to be set (and, when appropriate or possible, an offering to be taken from everyone – and this, too, is a gesture of the liturgy – for the Church and the poor). Children can bring the bread and wine forward and place them on the Table. In some settings, if the celebration of the Eucharist is with a small group of children, then perhaps the whole assembly can move to a position of standing around the altar when the bread and wine are in place.

The Communion procession is perhaps the most important of the liturgy. That assembly comes forward – not to help themselves – but to be served one by one by ministers of Communion. Every liturgical direction points toward the importance of this act being done as a procession. A procession is the ordered and spirited moving of a community. When you are in a procession, you are part of a community. Everything should support this: the music, the order of coming forward, the manner and the number of the ministers of Communion. It is a time to sing and there is need for song, but it must be song that supports a procession, a Communion procession, and not a catechetical song (more appropriate during the Liturgy of the Word) or an engaging song with complex gestures that might distract from the central event of the Communion procession.

The last procession is again the assembly's. In Masses with children, there is seldom a convincing reason for the presider and other ministers to leave by themselves. They might join in the general going out of everyone, sometimes with song, other times with instrumental music or silence.

The entrance, Communion, and final procession should be matters of great concern, of good habits and of periodic evaluation by the school's liturgy team and administrators. Processions such as that during the entrance of the presider and other ministers, the procession during the Liturgy of the Word, and the procession of the gifts can provide a space for many children to participate actively with physical movement, so important in children's psychology. As such, processions can give space for progression in liturgical inculturation, as these additions to the liturgy with children can be an authentic organic progression because of the new shape it gives the liturgy, while complying with the basic intention of the liturgical documents and, on a wider breadth, with the nature and tradition of the liturgy in its relation to the developing spirituality of children and the local culture.³¹

i) The Value of Repetition

Liturgies and all rituals require repetition. Children's liturgies are no exception. A person or a group has to know their liturgy as the child knows the beloved bedtime story or the room and the bed. Then it is a ritual.

Some of our rituals we do know that well: the sign of the cross and the Our Father, for example. We should be just as much at home in the liturgy of the Mass. It becomes ours to do through repetition: its words and its melodies, its rhythms of reading and singing, its patterns of prayer and communion. These are like a familiar room to us.

³¹ A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity and Catechesis*, p. 48.

We can learn about repetition from little children. Does a child want a new story read every night? Does a child want a different place to go to bed every night? The same old words, the same old place – these are a kind of a home, physical and spiritual territory where the child delights, set free by the familiar.

The liturgy has a wonderful sense of joining things that change and things that remain the same. Even more, it has a structure in which the changing and the unchanging meet. That structure is something our children are to grow up with so that they can make the liturgy their own. We know in our bones how alleluia leads to Gospel, how “for ever and ever” leads to “Amen.” And when such is truly ours, then we are shaped by it. When we do not have to look at a piece of paper to know that “We lift them up to the Lord” is our answer to “Lift up your hearts,” then lifting up our hearts to the Lord will begin to be a way we live our lives.

Certainly repetition is a two-edged sword. Those who would prepare the liturgy for children and children for the liturgy have to be students of repetition. They have to watch the rhythms and how they work. They have to know the things that are always the same at every Mass, those that are only for a season like Lent, those that are only once a year (for a feast like All Saints). Most of all, they have to respect and handle with great care the way that the Mass structure itself is rendered familiar and accessible to the children in every celebration of the liturgy without making repetition a boring routine.³²

j) Music and Singing

Music has always been an integral part of Christian worship. It serves not only our rituals but also the events of daily life. Music is an excellent tool for involving

³² Cfr. J. Watson, “Whose Model of Spirituality Should be Used in the Spiritual Development Of School Children?” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 1 (2000): 91-101.

children in worship. We need to use it to its fullest potential in the Catholic school setting.

The assembly sings their liturgy. That is the way things are supposed to be. They do not sing during the liturgy or at the liturgy. They sing the liturgy. This is one of the most basic and powerful things we can do in preparing children to participate in the liturgy. It can gradually change the whole way we adults think about and celebrate Sunday Mass.

There are some jobs that the plain speaking voice cannot handle because it is not the words alone that are important but what they have to express.³³ Words have something to carry out. We need time to dwell in some of the words. We need melodies that let the texts get inside us, melodies that bring the words and the action back to us. That is shown when we cannot simply recite the words to a hymn, but we have to start humming it, singing it, and then the words come. And children are experts in carrying the message across with music and song.

Within the liturgy of the Mass with children, there are some things that should always be sung. First are the acclamations. These include the Sanctus and the memorial acclamation and the great Amen. All of these are part of the Eucharistic Prayer in which the children's assembly is participating by listening and joining in to acclaim that Prayer. Other acclamations at Mass include the Alleluia that leads to the Gospel.

Second, the psalm that comes during the Liturgy of the Word is to be sung, at least the refrain that belongs to the assembly. The psalm is not a reading; it is its own thing, a biblical song. It is a good way for the children to learn to pray, but this has to

³³ Cfr. J.M. Kubicki, *Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol: A Case Study of Jacques Berthier's Taizé Music* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), p. 119.

come with the assistance of good catechesis. It needs a measure of quiet surrounding it, and it needs a sense of contemplation or prayer.

Third, the children can sing the litanies. Litanies are a form of prayer where the prayer is made. It is one thing to say “Lord, have mercy” in a speaking voice after a series of petitions, and it is quite another thing to sing those words. The intercessions or prayers of the faithful are a litany. The penitential rite is usually a litany. Before Communion there is another litany, the “Lamb of God.” They all offer the possibility for singing and music.

Fourth, the children can sing in procession, as explained before. Without music here, the procession can seem like a lineup. Without music, it is that much harder to sense that here is something we do together. The voices tell us that.

In celebrations with children, music is a priority. Just singing *a capella* impoverishes the ritual action as children engage more easily in a musical setting. In the actual visits to the different schools a constant claim of the children was the need for music in the liturgy. I can still remember María, who insistently wanted to play the *maracas* or *pandereta* in the *Misa de la Escuela* as she does in the *Misas de Aguinaldo* every year.

The DMC says, “Singing is of great importance in all celebrations, but it is to be especially encouraged in every way for Masses celebrated with children, in view of their special affinity for music.”³⁴ If appropriate music is chosen, it will reflect what is being proclaimed in the readings and homily. The melody needs to be singable and appropriate for children. We have to make sure that it fits their vocal range, that the rhythm is engaging and that the melody does not include too many large leaps. The text has to be

³⁴ DMC, n. 30.

theologically sound and be able to be understood by children. Children need texts in concrete language; obscure symbolism only confuses a child. Children will quickly learn and remember ideas that are put to music and will retain them longer than when expressed in words.

The music chosen for the celebration of the liturgy with children should also be concise and adaptable. When the music is brief the children will pick up the melody more quickly and enjoy the repetition. Repetition is not only good for children, it is necessary as I have already explained.

k) Silence and Openness to the Mystery

If music and singing are important, we cannot forget that silence is also of great importance, even in celebrations with children. Silence has been somewhat neglected in practice, though it is there in the *editio typica*: after the invitation to pray, after the readings that precede the Gospel, after the homily, after Communion. Each silence is linked to what came before. At some point, children need to consider each of these silences. Classroom preparation and even an occasional homily can do this.

As a society, we are uneasy with silence. Caribbean culture is even more uneasy with silence, as our children *llevan la música por dentro* – as we mentioned earlier, they carry the music in their interior. Children perhaps less so than adults, but we like to believe they are less inclined to silence than even we are. Like so much else, it may be that they are ready; we might be the ones who are afraid of experiencing silence.

Silence, too, is prayer and worship. The DMC remembers, that “silence is a part of the celebration and must be observed at the times indicated.”³⁵ It goes on to say that this is just as true of Masses with children, otherwise too much emphasis will be laid on

³⁵ DMC, n. 37.

external actions. Even children in their own way are capable of meditation and silence.³⁶ In a culture that abhors silence, children and adults alike may need help to understand how to use these moments of corporate silence for prayer, meditation and reflection. Praying in silence is a skill that can be rehearsed and learned.³⁷

At different times during the celebration children can learn to recollect themselves, make a short meditation or simply praise God and pray silently.³⁸ This can be done, for example, after Communion, or even after the homily. But most of the time, silence needs stillness. That would mean that the presider is not fidgeting with a book, the cantor is not trying to communicate something to the organist, the acolytes are not having a conversation. Stillness, no movement, is needed. And long enough for the silence to settle in and take hold. Experience will show how long the silence should be. The practice should be fairly regular so that the length of the silence is taken for granted and everyone is thus freed from wondering about it. For this to happen, those who are responsible for ending a silence – the cantor, who will begin the psalm after the silence that follows the first reading, or the presider, who will end the silence after the homily, or after Communion by inviting, “Let us pray” – must have a good and common sense (not one cantor with one notion and one with another) of the length of the silence.

Like almost everything else at liturgy, silence does not have a chance at the Mass unless it gets practiced somewhere else. Where there is the practice of regular Morning Prayer in the classroom, silence should have some small place. This can follow the invitation “Let us pray,” and be placed after a short daily reading from Scripture.

³⁶ See J.P. Jung, “L’expérience religieuse des enfants,” *La Maison-Dieu* 140 (1979): 65-84; J. Schmid. *Nurturing your Child’s Spirit*. Loveland: Treehaus Publications, 1997.

³⁷ J. Patano Vos, *Unpacking the Directory for Masses with Children*, p. 97.

³⁸ DMC, n. 37. Cf. IGMR, n. 23.

The *Directory for Masses with Children* adds this about silence: “[The children] need some guidance, however, so that they will learn how, in keeping with the different moments of the Mass (for example, after the homily or after Communion), to recollect themselves, meditate briefly, or praise God and pray to God in their hearts.”³⁹

Silence is not just important because it is a door to communicate with God, but because it can also move to a more profound participation in the liturgy. Children’s liturgies risk the danger of becoming full of activity and external participation. But beyond that participation of hands and lips, there is a participation of heart and spirit that is expression of a more personal participation. More important than “active participation in the rite” is “receptive participation in the mystery,” as this is the expression of the primacy of grace, of liturgy as primarily the reception of the gift from God.⁴⁰

Besides the effort we place in having the active participation of the children, in having them involved in the ritual actions of gathering, greeting, sharing, etc., we should not forget the importance of creating an atmosphere of respect, adoration, and contemplation of a more profound, transcendent reality present in the liturgy.

L) The Place of the Celebration

Celebrations of the Eucharist with children tend to be either in a church or chapel, or in a school gym or auditorium. The *Directory* lists a few criteria for the place where the Eucharist is to be celebrated with children. It notes that the primary place is the church, but “within the church, a space should be carefully chosen if available, that will be suited to the number of participants. It should be a place where the children can act with a feeling of ease according to the requirements of a living liturgy that is suited to

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. Filippi, “Il Direttorio nella luce della pedagogia catechistica,” *Rivista Liturgica* 61 (1974): p. 652.

their age.”⁴¹ If someplace other than the church is chosen, it “should be appropriate and worthy of the celebration.”⁴²

Note that the concern here is for a space that will allow this particular group of children to celebrate the liturgy. A space that will hold 800 is not appropriate for 80; but perhaps a space within that large space is. Some stability is necessary. All that has been said of repetition would require being at home in the space. Even when another space is regularly used for liturgies with children, the children should be introduced to all facets of the church building itself, the place where they come on Sundays for liturgy.

The experience in the different schools visited has been that too often schools choose very ordinary spaces for children’s Masses, or else simply go into the main church with no effort to use the space wisely. In the case of using a gym, hall, or cafeteria, very often things work against building a sense of reverence and worship. Children bring the habits of classroom, gym or hall to the liturgy when, in fact, we are meant to bring the habits of liturgy to all these other places. But if we never learn the habits of liturgy, we have nothing to bring. It is not a matter at all of some spaces being “holy” and others not. It is a matter of understanding the great difference the environment makes to the liturgy. It is exactly the same understanding that should keep us from a decision to use the church building without any effort to make it an environment suitable for the children to celebrate their liturgy.

m) Art and Environment

The DMC briefly discusses the importance of the preparation of the space of worship and visual images as part of a children’s liturgical spirituality.⁴³

⁴¹ DMC, n. 25.

⁴² Cfr. Ibid.

There are unlimited possibilities for artistic works that can enhance the liturgy. For example, children can fashion banners that add festivity to processions. They can prepare decorations for the church. They can prepare a collage, hanging or fabric art, which can be made into a vestment, altar or ambo hanging.

Art has always been an important part of the liturgy and it can certainly play an even more important role in children's liturgical spirituality, as children themselves can become artists and can be involved in the process of preparation of the liturgical environment. However, this work should be directed by someone who has a keen understanding of liturgical principles, the rhythm of the ritual and the nature of art.⁴⁴

Special attention should also be given at these celebrations to the visual elements of prayer: objects, vessels, books, bread and wine. They should all be meaningful, expressive, beautiful, ornate, clean and artistic, as children appreciate beauty, and art can serve them as a door to the celebration of the mystery.

The objects and furnishings of the liturgy are to be worthy. The rule should be: Take care that these are worthy of their task and are used with reverence. Take care also that the community established a steady practice regarding each of these things. The temptation is always to neglect these in favor of what is secondary.

Those who have responsibility for furnishings and objects and for their arrangement should know thoroughly what is said in the documents regarding environment and art in worship.⁴⁵ The school liturgy committee or catechists should

⁴³ Nn. 35-36.

⁴⁴ J. Patano Vos, *Unpacking the Directory for Masses with Children*, p. 97.

⁴⁵ See for example, the two documents issued by the USCCB: The first one, *Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship* (Washington: USCCB 2000), was approved by the full Conference; and the earlier document, presented by the Bishops Committee on the Liturgy: *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* (Washington: USCCB, 1978).

establish the basic setting, the assembly gathered first around the Word and then around the Table. They should make certain that the books, vesture and other items are worthy and are being well cared for and handled. Then attention should be given to those other objects that may be needed for particular liturgies. This constant attention will be needed for the basics because sometimes the tendency seems to go off on doing mobiles or banners or Advent wreaths or Christmas trees and to make do with old lectionaries, vessels, and vestments. Care should be put both in the basics and in other expressions of art, especially if prepared by the children.

n) Comments during the Liturgy

Sometimes those who prepare liturgies and lead liturgies with children feel that they have to say many things. This comes from good motives: wanting the children to understand, wanting to be friendly, fearing that the liturgy by itself will be too obscure. What happens too often, however, is that the liturgy is over-explained or that a running commentary replaces the liturgy. This has to be resisted. The DMC, like the GIRM, mentions a number of times when some additional words by the presider may be in place. It does not mean to say that such words are needed at every liturgy or at every juncture where they are allowed.

Comments should be carefully prepared beforehand so that they stay short. If such comments proliferate, the message is clear: Liturgy is like a class and the presider is a teacher. The presider labors always under the burden of remembering that this liturgy belongs to the Church and especially to this assembly. It is not a stage or a podium.

Presiders have a responsibility at every liturgy to study and prepare all the texts they are to speak: especially the opening prayer, the Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer after

Communion. These are formal texts, some far stronger than others, but all needing careful attention or adaptation if they are to be truly heard in the assembly.

o) Continuity with the Parish Liturgy

The Church's primary and normal existence is the parish. The liturgy of the parish, and that means above all else the Sunday Eucharist of the assembled parishioners, is the heart of parish life. All other celebrations of the liturgy are secondary to and dependent upon that Sunday liturgy. This has been the way of the Church from the beginning. First this took shape in the Lord's Day gathering of the baptized around the bishop; the Scriptures were read and the Eucharist was celebrated. Later, local groups gathered around a presbyter delegated by the bishop.⁴⁶ That is our practice still.

A school or any other expression of the parish does not create a liturgical life apart from that of the parish. It lives by the Sunday Eucharist. When the parish enters into the season of Advent or Lent, the school is part of that entry. When the parish is preparing catechumens for Baptism, the school should also echo that preparation.

The direction of liturgy in the school, then, should never be to create its own independent liturgical life, to act as if it existed in a void. The parish liturgy may not be as solid and strong as desired. That should not keep the school from being an example of liturgy well celebrated. But even in doing this, the school needs to remember and show in some visible ways how it draws its life from the Sunday Eucharist and the seasonal observances and the initiatory practices of the parish.

⁴⁶ Cfr. A.J. Chupungco (ed.), *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, Vol. 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 95-114.

p) Dignity, clarity and simplicity

In the DMC, we read: “The priest should be concerned above all about the dignity, clarity, and simplicity of his actions and gestures.”⁴⁷ Those three nouns – dignity, clarity, simplicity – might be good ways to think about and even to measure our progress in celebrating the liturgy with children.

Dignity is from the Latin word for "worthy." Everything that we do should strive for this worthiness. As the *Directory* notes, this would mean avoiding anything that is “childish.” Other words might be added to this one: avoid what is casual, trivial, all that is unworthy. Dignity is putting on something else, our amazing baptismal garments, our person clothed with Christ. Do we achieve ever greater dignity in our liturgies?

Clarity is parallel to this. It does not mean that we make the liturgy into a game in which all rules are explained. Clarity is rather letting the rites, words, and signs of the liturgy speak for themselves and show in transparency what they mean. Clarity is attention to the liturgy’s own patterns and priorities and not confusing them with our own. Clarity is in the striving for that regular practice of a liturgy that children and adults know to be their own work for God’s reign. Such clarity in liturgy rules out any effort to impose the agenda or personality of the presider on the rite.

Simplicity is the burden and the genius of the Roman rite. But how do we keep simplicity from turning into a poverty on the one hand, or being rejected in favor of someone’s complex agenda on the other? Thus we have different liturgies, from the ones that are merely a running through the words and gestures to liturgies that make it difficult to know if the Eucharist was celebrated at all. Neither approach trusts our simple Roman liturgy. The challenge to those who prepare and celebrate with children is to seek after

⁴⁷ DMC, n. 23.

that simplicity. That is why it is important to know what is important in celebrating the liturgy with children.

q) Liturgical Inculturation and Popular Religion

From all sides of the problem – theological, cultural, pedagogical, psychological, spiritual, and liturgical – the celebration of the Eucharist with children asks for an incessant attempt of adaptation and inculturation. Church documents have insisted, permitted, and even encouraged this process of cultural adaptation. The DMC states that from the beginning of the liturgical reform it has been clear to everyone that some adaptations are necessary in these Masses with children.⁴⁸ Read in conjunction with *SC*,⁴⁹ we understand the importance of an “even more radical adaptation of the liturgy”⁵⁰ as a means to foster an ever growing liturgical spirituality in our children.

If creativity was promoted in the composition of the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*; if the *Directory* set the road for a deeper adaptation of the liturgy, also expressed in the preparation of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*; and if organic progression in liturgies with children is already supplying aspects not envisioned by the liturgical documents, it is perhaps possible that a deeper creativity – always in fidelity to tradition – is not simply an option for adaptation but an imperative for renewal. An imperative for the local Church of Puerto Rico to celebrate a liturgy that remains relevant to its being and culture, that has human and divine impact on the life of the faithful, and that fosters a liturgical spirituality founded in the incarnational consequences of the Paschal Mystery.

⁴⁸ Cfr. DMC, n. 20.

⁴⁹ See nn. 37-40.

⁵⁰ *SC*, n. 39.

The reality of uninculturated liturgies with children calls for a process of study and renewal in the Catholic schools of Puerto Rico. The deep conscience and awareness of the values of the local culture will favor this process of liturgical renewal, but priests, catechists, teachers, and all the persons involved in the preparation of children's liturgies need to understand that those cultural values are not just to be celebrated in the *plazas* and in the parishes' main liturgical celebrations around the Puerto Rican Church feasts. All school liturgies and all celebrations of the Eucharist with children are to be incarnated in the local reality and culture. They are to be embedded in the local culture, taking into consideration the *ethos*, the signs, and popular expressions of faith and religion, as well as local artistic and musical expressions that can enhance worship.

Some practical expressions of the local culture that have to be taken in consideration in the celebration of the liturgy with children in Puerto Rico can be:

- the celebration of the feasts or the incorporation of devotions to: Our Lady of Divine Providence; the Virgin of Guadalupe; the Puerto Rican lay saint, Blessed Carlos Manuel Rodríguez; the Holy Rosary and the Holy Cross;
- the popular celebration of each city's or town Patron saint, in the *Fiestas Patronales*;
- the importance of the celebration of Advent with its *Misas de Aguinaldo*;
- the use of typical religious art and imagery of the saints;
- the use of typical Puerto Rican musical instruments and music;
- the use of Puerto Rican Spanish language in the readings of Scripture;

- the practice of “Rogativas” or religious processions in which the community prays for a common cause;⁵¹
- the popular use of religious symbols or objects of devotion: rosaries, medals, holy cards;
- the extended practice of sacramentals like blessings and the sprinkling with Holy water.

All these expressions of local culture can enrich and inspire the liturgy to be an incarnated reality even though they are not part of the official Sacramental *ordo* of the Church. The celebration of the liturgy with children is no exception and these expressions of popular religion can inspire the practices of worship with children. Popular devotions and manifestations of local religiosity, the Marian spirit of the Puerto Rican people, the love for the visual and musical aspects of a lively liturgy, the spontaneity, joy, *ritmo y energía* of the local culture, all have to find place in the way the children worship. Incorporation of music, art, and devotions, as well as the respect for the cultural identity of Puerto Rico, need to fill the spirit of the liturgy with children in the Catholic schools of the Island.

r) Time and the Calendar of School Liturgies

Schools, like any other parts of the parish, live by the parish’s Sunday Eucharist.

The Catholic school is part of a parish, even though it may not be a Parochial school *per*

⁵¹ The *Rogativas* have been a historical practice going back centuries. A famous rogativa in the history of Puerto Rico, that has given name to all the following, was that of 1797, when the British held the old city of San Juan under siege and the local Bishop organized this religious procession of prayer asking for God’s help. That same year they mysteriously sailed away. Later, the commander claimed he feared that the enemy was well prepared behind those walls; he apparently saw many lights and believed them to be reinforcements. Some people believe that those lights were torches carried by women in the rogativa. Today a famous monument stands in the *Plazuela de la Rogativa*, a little plaza with a statue of the Bishop and three women, commemorating the religious event.

se. The Sunday liturgy, not our school liturgy, is primary. The Scriptures of Sunday should surface within the school's life. The psalm and other songs of Sunday should not be absent from the school's singing. The way the parish observes the liturgical times is also of great importance in beginning to think of how the school will observe the liturgical seasons. Likewise, patronal feasts and days of diocesan importance should have their impact on the school's calendar.

Second, the school lives within its own calendar. We might want to ignore this, but we do so at great risk. Schools in Puerto Rico have an academic year that begins in the end of summer (early August) and ends in the spring, usually during Easter time. The school begins a long holiday before Advent has ended and only resumes after the feast of the Epiphany. Within the school's year there are various times of special observance or special stress. When we begin to plan the calendar of liturgies for a school, the schedule is not blank. It has not only the parish year already on it, but also the academic year.

Third, our approach to a calendar of school liturgies should not be, at the start, a discussion about when the Eucharist can be celebrated. A proposal would be to begin, rather, with a sense for seeking those days when the school as a whole (or perhaps several grades together) ought to join for a liturgy.

The Paschal Triduum should be the center of the school calendar. These three days are about the solemn and joyful observance of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection kept not as historical commemoration but as present to the world now, in our midst, especially in Baptism. All liturgy preparation begins with the Triduum and so must that of the school. And here it becomes clear just how bound the school must be to the parish, for the celebration of the liturgies of the Triduum is ordinarily in the parish,

almost never the school, with the exception of Catholic schools run by religious Orders of priests.

So the first step in a calendar for the school year is looking to the Triduum. From those three days, our year spreads out in both directions. The Triduum has to be more than three days on a calendar. It has to become a center to the lives of teachers and other adults, as well as the students. That is the point of beginning. But, how does the school community observe the Paschal Mystery as central in its life and calendar if they are not present for liturgy during those days because of Easter recess? Creativity has to come into play and each school will have to find an appropriate pastoral response in preparation for the Triduum. An effective practice I have experienced in Puerto Rico is the celebration of a *Pascua Juvenil* and *Pascua Infantil* – a Paschal Triduum preparation celebration which, in the setting of a Catholic school, can include different pastoral activities (reflections, celebrations, Penance celebrations, and a final Eucharistic celebration) during the final school day before Easter recess. Other practices can include retreats, community celebrations of the sacrament of Penance, special events like the *Via Crucis Viviente* – a representation of the Stations of the Cross, so popular in the Latin cultures.

After the Triduum, the Church marks down Easter time. How are we to keep the festive spirit of Easter during the final month or weeks of the school year? The celebration of First Communion and Confirmation at school is a sacramental praxis of all Catholic schools in Puerto Rico. This way, these celebrations and their festive preparation in the spirit of Easter, can permeate the school liturgical spirit. All other celebrations, like a special end-of-the-school-year liturgy or any special Marian liturgy in May should be prepared in full light of Easter.

The calendar then goes backwards from the Triduum. The season of Lent should include prayer, penance, and charity expressed in the concrete life of the Catholic school. The liturgy of this season should be a call to the children to remember what it means to be baptized and to do Penance. If the parish or school has catechumens preparing for Baptism, the children should also be aware of them. It may be appropriate to celebrate some of the rites of the RCIA (such as the presentation of the Lord's Prayer and of the Creed) within the school community. The school may decide that at this one season there is to be a weekly liturgy – if not of the whole school, then of groups of classes. The first of these, of course, is the liturgy of Ash Wednesday.

Advent and Christmas are both seasons full of expressions of popular religiosity in the Puerto Rican tradition. But, what do we say about a season that begins in the aftermath of the Thanksgiving holiday – of great importance also in the Puerto Rican setting - and gets tangled in the culture's secular Christmas. Not only that, but the school is probably not in session for most of the days of the liturgical season of Christmas.

School policy should give full attention and importance to Puerto Rican popular religion celebration of Advent and Christmas, as well as the liturgical praxis of these seasons, and hold off secular expressions of "Christmas spirit." The celebration of school *Misas de Aguinaldo* should have great importance for the school community that gathers to celebrate the Eucharist with children in the popular spirit of the Advent season, using signs and music of Puerto Rican culture. After recess, the school should maintain the Puerto Rican celebration of *Octavitas*, which can enrich the liturgy of Christmas time, and prepare the way to *La Fiesta de la Candelaria*, or the feast of the Presentation of the

Lord, which also incorporates traditional Puerto Rican expressions of devotion and popular religion.

The next step in a school calendar, then, is a look at the feasts of the year. This begins with the general calendar of the Church. A school should not be satisfied only with this, however. Each place needs to look also to the local calendar: What saints are important in this community? What feasts bring to the community the suffering and the rejoicing in their own past as Christians? Some suggestions that could be part of the liturgical calendar of Catholic schools in Puerto Rico are:

- August: Saint Joseph Calasanz⁵² or the beginning of the school year;
- September: The Holy Cross;
- October: Month of the Holy Rosary;
- November: Our Lady of Divine Providence;⁵³
- December: Advent, Our Lady of Guadalupe;
- January: *Octavitas*,⁵⁴
- February: *La Candelaria*,⁵⁵
- March, April: Lent and Easter
- May: Month of the Virgin Mary and closing of the school year

Catholic schools should let the several seasons and the feasts, with their Eucharists and other liturgical celebrations, be central to the life of the school. This

⁵² Patron Saint of Catholic popular education with devotion in many places in Puerto Rico, because of the influence of the Piarists in the history of education in the Island.

⁵³ The Solemnity of the Patron of Puerto Rico, celebrated November 19, holiday of the discovery of Puerto Rico.

⁵⁴ This is the time following the feast of the Epiphany, celebrated in Puerto Rico as a traditional season following the solemn feast of the Epiphany on January 6.

⁵⁵ The feast of the Presentation, or Our Lady of the “Candelaria.”

cannot be done in a year, but it can be begun. And it needs the repetition of the years to do its work.

For this to come about, more than well-prepared celebrations of the liturgy are necessary. There needs to be a rhythm of preparation-celebration-reflection, going on between pastors, catechists, children, and within the community as a whole. Most often this will be seen in the classroom through topics of discussion, the songs, the art projects, the Scripture, stories, and poetry read in the days and weeks before one of the liturgies. And it will be seen also in the things talked about after the liturgy. Catechists need resources for this – the first of which is the liturgy itself with its texts and its music – but more than resources, they need a commitment to the work, beauty, and power of a liturgy that is an expression of the life of the Church and life of the people, the local culture.

3. The Disposition of the Children

In considering the timing of our school celebrations, we must also take into consideration the needs of children, as well as of those of the liturgy and the liturgical year. Having presented the reality of the school's celebration of the liturgical year let us now consider the needs of the students.

Liturgical documents often talk about the importance of the person's disposition or ability to fruitfully enter into the celebration.⁵⁶ For most people, but especially for young children, time is a significant factor in their disposition. Many schools still operate on a "first Friday of the month" Mass schedule. However, this does not take into account the needs of students. Choosing a time and day which, for this group of students, is most conducive to religious celebration is essential to the success of the celebration. The day before Christmas vacation and the Friday of the first week of school are inappropriate

⁵⁶ Cfr. DMC, n. 26.

times for celebration for most children. When those preparing celebrations give serious consideration to receptivity of the students in scheduling celebrations, discipline problems are reduced, and later reflection and mystagogy is more fruitful.

An adequate period of preparation is also a critical factor in scheduling celebrations. The DMC insists that our schedules take preparation time into consideration.⁵⁷ It is crucial to establish the celebration schedule early in the school year.

When many families do not participate in parish life or when parish celebrations are in some way deficient, school liturgy planners are often tempted to use school celebrations as replacements for parish celebrations. But we do children no favor when we give in to such temptations. The job of school liturgy is to lead children to full participation in the community's liturgy, not to replace it. The school can no more substitute for the parish than the parish can substitute for the school. And celebrating out of time simply teaches children that time is irrelevant and all that matters is that the thing gets done.

The liturgies that we celebrate with children should be in great continuity with other regular occurrences in their lives. There are three special things to be noted here. First, we learn to do what is expected of us at liturgy in our other rites. If liturgy asks that we sing, we must be learning to sing somewhere else. The children cannot be expected to learn to sing just at liturgy. They will learn because song is something we do together at Morning Prayer in the classroom or at meal prayer in school or home. If liturgy asks that the children keep silence in prayer, it can expect that we have learned to do this at bedside prayer before sleep or at the short prayer that concludes our day together. If liturgy asks that we listen well to the Scriptures, it is because we practice such listening at

⁵⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, n. 27.

other times of prayer and at other times when the Bible is opened and read at home or school. If liturgy asks that we praise and thank God and pray to God for the needs of the world, it can do so because we are people who practice this kind of praying every day. The Church is filled with ways that all these things can happen regularly, but we have been slow to make them our own. Instead, we tend to let the liturgy bear all the burden - which it cannot.

Second, the liturgies we celebrate with children have a context of catechesis.⁵⁸ Children need the preparation of listening to the Scriptures, learning the tunes of hymns or refrains and discussing their words, discovering the stories of saints and the traditions of the seasons. Such catechesis builds and deepens each year for the child moving through the grades.

Third, the liturgies are to have a sort of echo to them. Their tunes are heard at daily prayer in the following days and weeks; their homilies are discussed and expanded. And not only that, but the deeds of the liturgy – the thanks and remembering and the breaking of Bread and the eating and drinking, the ashes and the Easter candle and the blessings and the peace greeting – all these become the lens through which we understand the faith and share that faith in the formation of children. This is perhaps what the Church means by *mystagogy*, that word that described how the early Christians used Easter to “unfold the mysteries,” to let the newly baptized ponder how their very lives are summed up in Baptism and in Eucharist. Those who teach children are mystagogues also, charged to draw from the liturgy the strength of our own lives and to return with the children again and again to that liturgy for understanding how we are to live.

⁵⁸ Cfr. J. Schmid, *Nurturing your Child's Spirit* (Loveland: Treehaus Publications, 1997), p. 22.

All of this learning little by little through daily prayer how to be the assembly, the catechetical preparation for every liturgy and the mystagogical remembering of each liturgy are the making of a wholeness of which liturgy is the center.

B. The Need for Liturgical Formation

A final, important consideration in this practical liturgical theology of children recalls the importance of liturgical formation for the whole school community. This was a need evidenced in the visits to the different schools. The dialogue with children, catechists, and parents revealed the need – and profound desire – for a continued and more profound liturgical formation that would lead to a fruitful and active participation in the Eucharist.

How we celebrate is part of who we are. Therefore, we must celebrate properly to be ourselves, to remember properly who we are. Because liturgy is patterned and repetitive, it can form us. Each time we follow the pattern, the pattern becomes a part of us. For better or worse, the patterns of our celebrations become part of us, part of our faith, part of our way of being in the world. This was evident in the liturgical patterns of the schools I visited, which had become part of the liturgical *ethos* of each school community, both with positive and negative implications.

Because liturgy does its work of formation at such a profound level, we who take a leadership role in school celebrations need to do our work with the fullest possible awareness of what liturgy is all about. This means that school staffs need to be involved in a process of liturgical formation as much as the students do. Administrators need to ensure that opportunities for liturgical education are offered at least annually to school

staff members. And those who prepare liturgical celebrations for teacher groups should ensure that all celebrations model the best liturgical principles.

Students, like teachers, will also need two kinds of liturgical formation: formation which happens in a structured educational setting and formation which comes from the experience of celebration. The process of celebration is at its formative best when it happens in three distinct and separate stages: preparation, celebration and reflection.

1. Preparation as Formation

Students need to be involved in two kinds of preparation: of the celebration and of themselves. To the extent possible, children can help to decide which of the many options within the liturgical pattern will be used – songs, readings, decor and the arrangement of furniture, intentions for general intercessions, even who is best to perform each ministry. The teacher may have to present younger children with a short list of possibilities from which they may choose; older students with more experience may be able to assemble their own list of suggestions.

Time for adequate preparation is important.⁵⁹ The better prepared children are to celebrate, the better disposed they will be. Adequate preparation means that every student knows all the songs that will be used. Adequate preparation means that every person present is very familiar with the readings that will be proclaimed. Persons with special tasks to perform are well-rehearsed and comfortable with their assignments. Any new gesture which may be unfamiliar or any gestures which have proven problematic at past celebrations are rehearsed by all well in advance of the celebration. Regularly scheduled Mass practices are a part of any good program of liturgical formation. The energy we put into preparation indicates of the importance of the celebration.

⁵⁹ Cfr. DMC, n. 27.

2. *Celebration as Formation*

Celebration forms us just as surely as the hands of the potter form the clay. Angry, embittered hands produce malformed pieces prone to breakage. Patient, peaceful hands produce something serene. So it is with liturgy. Boring liturgy not only bores us for the moment, but, over time, it forms us into boring Catholics who believe religion and boredom go hand-in-hand. Lively, life-giving liturgy, that is part of the cultural context, forms us into Catholics who draw their life from their worship, their faith, their God; they go out to give life to the world as well. We do not leave liturgy untouched.

The liturgy teaches us how to celebrate, and it also teaches us how to live, how to be in the world. It teaches us about the reign of God and how to live it now. The festive music of our culture and liturgy teaches us the joyous nature of our worship and our faith. But it also trains us in the habits of joyful living, faithful to God and faithful to its own cultural roots, which are also a gift from God. The sign of peace teaches us that peace is a prerequisite for celebration and for kingdom life, while it trains us in the art of reaching out in reconciliation and forgiveness in daily life.

If we wish our children to grow into the Church's liturgy, then it is imperative to use the Church's language of celebration and to assist them in becoming fluent in it when we celebrate with them. Ritual is the Church's language of celebration. And children have an innate ritual capacity. They engage constantly and comfortably in symbolic play.⁶⁰ All we have to do is to give them adequate exposure to and experience with our ritual language, and they will begin to explore it, manipulate it, appreciate it and feel at home with it.

⁶⁰ Cfr. D. Apostolos-Cappadona, *The Sacred Play of Children*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1983.

But, of course, children also need opportunities to participate fully in the actual celebration of the liturgy. So, in schools we must take every opportunity to explore the Church's use of symbol and ritual in our celebrations. We have a rich treasury on which to draw. Our culture, our rites and texts, our liturgical traditions, and popular religion practices: they are all part of the treasure of which our liturgy with children will grow.

3. Reflection

A final moment in the process of the liturgy, including preparation and celebration, should include final reflection. All stances involved in the liturgical process, from the administration, catechists, teachers, students, and also parents, should participate in an evaluative reflection of the entire process. Formation calls for evaluation if it is to be considered a pedagogical process and out of the final reflection and evaluation new hints and perspectives, judgments and critique, can surface. This evaluation will maintain a dynamic tension that will enrich the liturgy the next time it is celebrated.

C. Final Thoughts

In this chapter, I have been exploring the concrete issues of children and worship from the perspective of a practical liturgical theology of children, in which the welcoming of children, their culture, spirituality, and development, infuses worship. In this practical liturgical theology many people share with pastors and catechists the responsibilities of preparing children for the liturgy and of celebrating the Eucharist in the school community. The entire school community can receive the presence of children in worship as gifts from God, as full human persons.⁶¹

⁶¹ Cfr. K. Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," *Theological Investigations* 8 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1971).

I have given particular attention to the relationship between liturgical practices with children and the issues of culture, spirituality, and pedagogy, suggesting that our liturgy with children can become a transformative experience both for the children and for the entire school community. A renewed liturgical praxis with children can provide a genuine and profound experience of worship that will foster the spiritual development of children according to their age, will build a school community founded in the Eucharist, and will provide a renewed vision of the local culture as a gift from God that can prove to be an alternative reality to the negative elements present in the consumerist culture that objectifies and uses children. While not trying to exhaust all the possibilities for a celebration of the liturgy with children, I have listed several concrete strategies for transforming the liturgical praxis of the celebration of the Eucharist with Children in the thorough inculturation in the concrete cultural context of Puerto Rico. I have suggested multiple ways in which schools might want to rethink their practices with children in worship so that children, feeling welcome, can be truly there, participating fully as a part of the community seeking to be the body of Christ in the world through the expression of their cultural identity and their own stage in spirituality.

Ultimately, the welcoming of children in the Eucharist is a matter of identity as embodied in its practices. Strategies for welcoming children in worship are therefore strategies about congregational identity in which the critical question is always, “Who, and whose, are we?” This practical liturgical theology of children has provided hints in discovering that a renewed praxis will have consequences for the self-understanding of the Catholic school community, its educational mission in the Church, and the liturgical life of all of its members.

A renewed liturgy in the spirit of this practical liturgical theology of children will help the school community to grow in Gospel values and to work for the coming of the reign of God. Such a liturgy is life giving, faith sustaining, hope fostering, and love nurturing, and it endures.

It offers relationship and meaning, providing a significant structure to time and seasons. Such a liturgy has rhythm and color and music and movement, according to the concrete cultural context. It will welcome children, and will help us discover in them the presence of the Risen Lord.

The celebration of the Eucharist according to the project of this practical liturgical theology of children will require a large investment of time and energy, and it will draw from the physical, emotional and intellectual reserves of all who participate. It cannot be created by one person or by a small, select group. It will take patience and imagination and creativity, and will require formation and discipline.

It will demand that pastors, catechists, teachers, and school administrators, give of self for the good of the children, making both sacrifices and commitments. It will take the very best each one has to offer and will provide a return more abundant than could be imagined.

Our children are entitled to participate in all this goodness because of their Baptism. Any steps required to welcome children to the Table and make them full, conscious, and active participants in the celebration of the Eucharist are worthwhile. In welcoming children we will be welcoming the Lord, and in welcoming children to the Table, we will also be preparing a banquet for all.

CONCLUSION

Practical theology is, in the words of Pam Couture, a theology “informed by practical knowing...a more formalized version of the thinking process through which an average person attempts to bring social science, cultural traditions, and religious convictions into dialogue with one another.”¹ Several kinds of practical knowing have informed this practical liturgical theology of children. This practical knowledge has come from many sources. First among these has been an engagement with the stories of children in their school communities. Other fountains of knowledge have been my own and others’ experiences with children along with the collective experience and reflections of various school communities in which I have been privileged to participate. The practical knowing has included several disciplines of study grounded in practice-based knowledge from psychology, spirituality, education, and various kinds of Biblical, theological, cultural, and liturgical analysis.

Accordingly, this project of a practical liturgical theology of children has been highly interdisciplinary. In this practical liturgical theology of childhood I have enthusiastically mixed various disciplines and forms of knowing toward the goal of creating a practical model of inculturating the celebration of the Eucharist with children in the context of Puerto Rican Catholic schools. All these forms of practical knowing have made their own partial contribution to a practical liturgical theology of children.

My reflections on children and childhood have tried to critically engage the practices, symbols, and stories from Scripture and Tradition and have drawn from the

¹ P. Couture, *Blessed Are the Poor? Women's Poverty Family Policy, and Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon 1991), p. 23.

theological resources within Christian theology to construct this practical liturgical theology of children. In my work I have made particular use of twentieth-century theologians, like Karl Rahner, who might have been considered unlikely candidates to provide assistance in constructing a practical theology of children.

After having surveyed all the necessary sources of this practical theology, and engaging in dialogue with the stories of children like José, Rosa, Pablo, and María, in their concrete schools and liturgical celebrations, I am most convinced that children, in their special needs, should be given the opportunity to celebrate the Mass in accordance with the measure of their psychology and growth in the faith. There is an evident need for an inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist with children, in which children can participate, in mind, body, and spirit. This practical liturgical theology has aimed to demonstrate that children, too, belong to the assembly of the Church, and have a right to full and active participation in our sacramental life, precisely as children, understood as full human subjects. The ancient tradition of admitting children to the sacraments and having them participate in diverse roles in the celebration, is a source of genuine insight and authentic understanding of the liturgy of the Church.

The Eucharist is an ecclesial celebration, not just of the children, but of the whole community. The children participate in unity with the whole Church. They are part of the assembly. Their celebrations must lead them toward the celebration with the whole Christian community. The required inculturation is not just a necessary adaptation for the celebration of the Mass with children, but an imperative for the whole liturgical community, who needs to celebrate the Paschal Mystery in the language and vitality of its own culture.

The fact that inculturated celebrations of the Eucharist with children are a necessity denounces the way the Eucharist is frequently celebrated with adults, for the reason for special celebrations with children – the reason for “la Misa de Niños” – is not just the age or psychology of children, but the little attention most communities give to their children, the dull and uninculturated way in which some communities celebrate. The concern for the inculturation of the Eucharist with children cries for a renewal and inculturation of the celebration of the Eucharist with adults.

We should be encouraged by the word of the Lord: “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me” (Lk 9:48), but we should also remember the other verse: “Whoever gives scandal to one of these little ones who believes in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone fastened round his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt 18:6). And, the obstacles the community sometimes puts in the children’s growth in the faith, by celebrating the liturgy in an uninculturated way, in a passive and boring tone, incapable of transmitting the joy of the Paschal mystery that is being celebrated, might be a way of scandalizing our children.

Referring to children in her novel *Silas Marner*, George Eliot wrote: “In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put in theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child’s”. Indeed I am convinced that the little hands of children will lead us as we continue the road of liturgical renewal. As we attempt to make children more active in their participation in the liturgy, children themselves will show us the way to a genuine

and conscious participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal. They will mysteriously teach us to proclaim Christ to others among our families and away from home, to proclaim Christ to others by living the “faith that works through love” (Gal 5:6; Cfr. DMC 55). As we bring them more fully into the liturgical assembly, they will show us the deep reality of what “meeting together”, being assembly, really means.

I would like to finish this thesis project sharing a personal experience. A few years ago, in a family restaurant in San Juan, my then two-year-old niece Natalie began to fuss and cry. My sister immediately went to the salad bar to try to find something that would quiet her until our meal arrived. She reached for a few crackers while my niece kicked and screamed. A man stood up at a nearby table, walked over to us, and remarked loudly: “*Por amor de Dios, ¿no puede callar a su nena?*” – which means: “For the love of God, can’t you shut up that little girl?” He then kept saying that he did not pay to eat out only to have to listen to little children screaming.

I was shocked. And my shock did not come so much by what the man said. Sure it is far nicer to dine in a restaurant without the sounds of a screaming child. I was shocked not just by the aggression in his voice and gestures, but mainly because of the underlying irony of the words: “*Por el amor de Dios*” – “For the love of God, shut that child up.” The very idea of associating God with the silencing of children appears preposterous to anyone even vaguely familiar with New Testament stories about Jesus’ interactions with children. Of course, the man in the restaurant was hardly engaging in theological reflection with his use of religious language! But this experience caused me to think about the way in which children constantly receive ambivalent messages from our society and Church about their worth and their welcome.

The family-oriented appearance of the restaurant seemed to say to children, “you are welcome here.” But the aggressive behavior of the man toward a crying child, and the passive acceptance of bystanders, communicated something very different. In a similar way the Church often manifests its ambivalence toward children in a set of “double messages” that seem to welcome them. Many congregations demonstrate that they in fact are not prepared to have children present in the liturgy. They express this ban of children through their “adults-only” liturgical patterns and through the disapproving words and glances they give to noisy or disruptive children. In the Church, no one stands up and shouts, “For the love of God, shut that child up!” like the man did in the restaurant. But, unfortunately, for all practical purposes, the message to children is, “For Christ’s sake, or at least for the sake of we adults who consider ourselves followers of Christ, either be quiet or leave!”

So, my thesis-project, has been part of my search for a transformative, child-affirming liturgical practical theology and for a Puerto Rican Church that genuinely welcomes children amid a culture and Church tradition that at best embraces them ambivalently. Ultimately, this pastoral liturgical reflection must lead me to engage in new efforts to share the insights and strategies for development and enhancement of the liturgical and educational ministry in Puerto Rico, sharing and implementing criteria for improving the local expressions of worship, in participation with Tradition and in response to the ethical challenges of our contemporary culture.

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