

Towards a renovation in Liturgy - integrating and inclusive – in the IMU
(Methodist Church in Uruguay)
by Inés Simeone – 2007

This paper is no more than a little introduction to the suggested subject, aimed at provoking the evaluation and reflection on liturgy in our church and consequently its renovation.

For some time we have been wondering in which way we can renew the liturgy within the IMU in an integrating and inclusive way, integrating our Methodist heritage and the culture and times to which we belong, inclusive as regards gender, age, different social groups and their diversities, ethnical groups...

1. The Liturgy

1.1. Throughout history

When we think of liturgy many times we think of singing, of dynamics, of animation, therefore it is relevant to ask ourselves:

What is liturgy? What do we understand by liturgy?

The Earth, created by God is a living space where human life and history come to be realized, where God relates –through his love- with his creatures and this relationship develops through liturgical action.

The word “liturgy”, from the greek **leitourgia**, is formed by the root leit- (from “laós”: people) and –urgía (job, office) means the action in favour of the people, the communitarian service. In ancient times all free action in favour of the people was called Liturgy¹.

*In Greek democracies it meant all the service made by any service in favour of the community. In Egypt, it meant any public service, even if it was paid. In Hellenic times it referred to any service, even private, carried out by slaves. From the II Century BC it also referred to the religious service.*²

In the seventieth (LXX) Greek translation of the scriptures, the word **liturgy** was used to designate any service carried out by the priests and Levites, to the temple.

Looking at the different religious expressions registered in the Old Testament we realize that some aspects of the liturgy in Israel are really interesting.

We would like to point out these:

- The cult of Israel was deeply linked to their reality
- The songs and recited words talked about their experience with God (Yahvé)

¹ Diccionario de Teología, Ed Loyola, SP, 1970, p.177

² ditto

- The liturgy denounced the suffering, the pain and oppression and declared the liberating actions of God.³

In the New Testament the word **liturgy** and its family appear only 15 times, 6 of these in the epistle to the Hebrews.

We find the word liturgy as referring to the religious service in the Old Testament in:

- Luke 1:23 *When the days of his priestly **service** (leiturgia) were ended, Zacharia went back home*

And Hb 9:12 and 10:11

We find the word liturgy associated to the civil world in:

- Romans 13:6 *For this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing.*

We find liturgy referring to the service to others in

- **2 Corinthians 9,12** *“For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;”*

And **Philippians 2, 25-30**

We find liturgy – with the meaning it is given in the Old Testament – as an image to analyze Paul’s missionary work in:

- Romans 15: 16 *“That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.”*

The apostle Paul considers the service of the hands in **favour** of the body as liturgy. Paul in the Epistles and Luke in the book of Acts (13,1-39 mention the tasks of “doctors and prophets” as liturgies. These doctors and prophets made themselves responsible for the spiritual nurturing of the community, they instructed the people who had just been converted, they supported the baptized and prepared the Christian reflection subjects for the whole community.

The **liturgies** retold by Luke did not arise from the disciples in order to animate people, they arose in the lives and through the lives of the people who became testimony to animate the community.

The first Christian communities interpreted their faith –in Christ- relating it to everyday life. For them the service offered through Jesus Christ to God, serving all humankind, constituted a liturgy.

It was the Christian Greek Literature which incorporated the word **leitourgia** and its family of words to refer to the Christian cult and its rites.

³ Garin, Norberto da Cunha – Liturgia en el Antiguo Testamento – Porto Alegre 1990

In apostolic times **the liturgy** was mainly a faith fact situated in the time of Salvation. The faith in Christ was lived in the community and the community lived its faith in Christ. **Each celebration was like a mirror, in which the true image of the community was reflected.**

As time went by, little by little the church began to abandon the simplicity of the celebrations. After the IVth Century Christianity was “filled” with splendor and adopted exaggerated and complicated rituals. The lay people began to be left aside in the preparation of the liturgy, and the priests began to prepare it, on behalf of the people.

For a long time the preparation and conduction of the liturgy was solely a task of the clerical body. The Catholic and Orthodox churches maintain today a fixed ritual according to the liturgical calendar, which is carried out in all their congregations in any part of the world.

1.2. Liturgy today

Liturgy is the service done by and for the people. God is the great liturgist and his best **liturgy** is the same history of salvation.

For us this is seen today in life, in the service and in the celebration, in which, aware of the Divine Grace, the people are called to be liturgists together with the Trinity, giving thanks and committing themselves to continue in the Liturgy of Life.

The church fulfills its mission and looks for sanctification in the service and the celebration – for the Methodist people, acts of mercy and of piety. The experience (of the church) must be manifested as a community of faith, of praise, of growth, of testimony, of love, of support and of service. With this affirmation we can state that the church, community of Christ, is liturgical.

The liturgy cannot be separated from the mission of the church, which is the mission of God in the world. And the church is expected to be building and showing the Abundant Life, denouncing the structures of sin which marginalize and kill the human beings and announcing the liberating love of the Trinity.

A Cuban liturgist called Amós López, talking about the liturgical celebration, says the following:

*Therefore, in each liturgical celebration we do not repeat, rather we grow towards hope, we make that hope present through the clamors of our days. The lack of creativity, the gap between the service and life, or a mistaken understanding of the sense of the Christian year are factors which, among others, can provoke the sensation that we repeat the celebrations and that everything remains the same in the community and in the planet.*⁴

⁴ López, Amós; Triana, Pedro; Manual Litúrgico, Publicación del Centro de Estudios y del Programa de Renovación Litúrgica del Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba, La Habana, 2005

2. The Renovation in Liturgy

The Renovation in Liturgy became stronger as from the Protestant Reform. The use of local languages and not Latin was a framework for this renovation.

With the expansion of Protestantism and its different branches, the liturgy took on different ways, colours, sounds and expressions, (having as foundations the interpretation of the Bible, or the Preaching.) These changes appeared as the liturgy reflected the cultures of the people who adopted Protestantism.

The Methodist movement of the XVIIIth Century presented an important renovation. John and Charles Wesley gave new nuances to the traditional service of the Church of England, mainly by using the language of the people. As far as music is concerned, Charles Wesley carried out a fundamental task in this renewal. The adaptation and composition of hymns was outstanding and it helped a lot in the growth of the movement.

In order to think about any renewal from our historical moment we have to consider the present meaning of the word liturgy, that is to say

Liturgy as a communitarian expression of the Christian faith – from its experience, its culture and its context- which takes place in the movement of faith of the Christian people.

According to Ernesto Barros Cardoso⁵, liturgical renovation also means:

-**To keep tuning up to** the tradition (or traditions), a respect for history, for the identities, the processes and the experiences that were transmitted by the past generations.

- **To renew**, discerning constantly about our legacy, to the light of the present day challenges... would it be a permanent metanoia in the way we feel, we think, and we act?

-**To be open** to establish new criteria, updating our paradigms.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God ... (Romans 12. 1 and 2)

Summing up, liturgical renovation must arise:

- from the tradition
- from enculturation
- from the need to be close to the context within which the celebration takes place.

In order to renew we must not forget the relationship between liturgy and

⁵ Cardoso, Ernesto de Barros; Renovação litúrgica: uma tarefa abrangente – Rio de Janeiro 1991

- **Spirituality** (*way and senses in the communication of that which transcends, that which is Sacred*)⁶
- **Celebration** (*symbolic and communicative actions, games and parties... a ritual memory*)⁷
- **Expression** (*through significant languages beyond words, beyond discourse and rationality*)⁸.

The liturgy – always in relation to life- cannot be dissociated from that which is happening, nor from the language which is spoken or the everyday expressions of people.

The adaptation of language, the use of native instruments, the songs with regional rhythms and words, body movement, the way in which messages are presented are some of the important elements of this renovation.

On the other hand, without forgetting the first Christian times when *each celebration was like a mirror, in which the real image of the community was reflected*, we must point out that *there can be no liturgical renovation without perspectives of change within the life of the community.*⁹

Some questions arise when we face all this:

Which are the challenges today?

Which are the situations which challenge us to learn from the past, from the traditions?

Facing which realities must we discern the right time (kairos) of God to act?

The charismatic movement and the Pentecostal groups – which refuse to use the word liturgy since they consider it belongs to the roman catholic tradition – centre their celebrations – usually without an established order or ritual – on spontaneous prayers, short songs (easy to learn) and testimonies. We cannot fail to mention here the “globalization of religious music” and its commerce.

On the other hand the historic protestant churches and the progressive catholic groups, from almost 25 years now have been living a process of assessment which sometimes results in the renewal of liturgy. These groups cannot escape from the globalization of liturgical expressions either.

The issue of the music (quality music) is very important. We must point out that liturgical music must:

- integrate lyrics and music
- be adequate to be sung in and by the congregation
- be related to the different moments of the service and the different times of the liturgical calendar.

⁶ Cardoso, Ernesto de Barros; Renovação litúrgica: uma tarefa abrangente – Rio de Janeiro 1991

⁷ ditto

⁸ ditto

⁹ Cardoso, Ernesto de Barros; Renovação litúrgica: uma tarefa abrangente – Rio de Janeiro 1991

- be connected with the gestures, the symbols, the rites, the visual and plastic elements, the dynamics and the games.

3. Sharing experiences

I would like to share with you the results of an experience carried out in Guadalajara, Mexico, 6 years ago. Some people from different protestant denominations, divided into groups, reacted to a presentation of the theologian Javier Ulloa, who was lecturing about **A New Ecumenical Liturgy**, and they analyzed liturgy from a local and global reality. They discussed the situation in general and they analyzed the local liturgical expressions. I will summarize the results of the groups:

About the context in general

- Unemployment, because the big companies take over the small companies and they generate unemployment.
- Violence, which comes as a result of this unemployment
- Negative ideologies, which are transmitted by the mass media
- Change of values, which results in lack of solidarity, charity and encounter with the brothers and sisters.

About the liturgies

- They look for globalization, with the music, without thinking about the content of the lyrics and without highlighting what is natural of each place.
- People get carried away by emotions and not by rational things
- They look for external examples to copy
- Services are replaced by concerts and by “light” preaching
- The image of the priest is replaced by that of the businessman
- They look for something easy and instant
- Many people take into account elderly people leaving aside children and young people, and others do the other way round.
- The criterion of using “productive people” is introduced.
- A lot of importance is attached to the new, leaving Christ aside, the church is secularized
- Many times the new is hardly analyzed (and many times it is not analyzed at all)
- The word suffering has been suppressed, and has been replaced by happiness
- The main objective of the traditional Christian celebrations (Christmas, Easter) has been neglected, and many times, abandoned.
- Fast services, quick solutions
- The same thing is repeated: American hymns translated into our languages. Therefore the native traditions are neglected and many times people sing without knowing the origin of the music. Many times the lyrics have nothing to do with the reality of the place where they are sung.
- The meaning of the community has been lost / preaching on TV
- The symbols have changed and they no longer remind us of the objective, the vision, the meaning of the message of the service.
- Education (as regards traditions, rites and symbols) has been neglected since infancy.

- There are no evening services, using crimes as a pretext.
- Reality is acknowledged, but we must be ready to evaluate it, to project, and to make changes.
- It is difficult to be open to other liturgical expressions, only self practices are considered true and unique. In order to maintain ecumenism we must know other churches, since all denominations have something new.
- Many groups are influenced by foreign cultural manifestations (ways of thinking, music, services)
- We acknowledge that there are no strong musical roots in the church, so we fail to stop the advance of the global movement.
- Consumerism, individualism, depersonalization, the number as indicator of success, no matter what, the importance of quantity over quality.
- Manipulation of religious symbols to retain power.
- Signs of post-modernism in our churches – people look for comfort and not for commitment in the churches

Alternatives of solution for this reality stated as from questions

Which elements or liturgical resources would you use to elaborate a new ecumenical liturgy in your region?

- Elements of the regional folklore – natural elements, visual symbols, which will draw people's attention, elements according to the time, the use of native musical instruments.
- To come to joint decisions working as a team, in spite of the differences
- To use a vocabulary that everybody can understand.
- To be inclusive. To use music sung by other religious groups, to allow children to participate in the liturgy
- To do things that will not offend anybody (visits)
- To use the common biblical lectionary
- To receive/offer appropriate training
- To take advantage of dates and events
- To use artistic, literary and poetic expressions
- To dramatize texts
- The Reading of the Bible
- Prayers of confession of our sins
- Renewal in the hymns (rhythm, accent, instruments)

Do you see dissociation between ethics and celebrations? If so, how can we overcome it?

- Yes, we definitely do!
- To overcome: to be conscious of what there is: to relate liturgy to life and identify the reasons of the dissociation: to be consequent in our words and our action
- To acknowledge our human limitations (there can be two people having communion who hate each other). We ask that we might have communion together tomorrow!

4. Group work thinking about the IMU

How do we evaluate liturgy in the IMU?

How do we relate the celebrations to the context in which we live?
How do we relate them to our everyday life?
How can we renew liturgy starting from what we are and what we have?
Can we overcome the differences? Can we create and then celebrate truly in unity?
Do we integrate people in the group who have important theological differences?
Can we respect and include the expressions of those who think completely different from us?

5. Some aspects to consider for the future
From the Coordination of the Liturgy Committee of the IMU

A work proposal for 2007-2008

In order to attach more quality to the liturgical work in the local congregations and bearing in mind that the service is a very important part of the communitarian life and of evangelization we propose:

1. To assess the liturgy that is carried out in our congregations;
2. To provide liturgical materials to the churches and institutions of the IMU (orders, songs, reflections,) for special events.
3. A workshop on Liturgical Renovation in our Pastoral Retreat, including:
 - a- Assessment: how is our service carried out?
 - b- Reflection on: How to renew thinking of who we are and what we have
 - c- Hand out of resources for congregational use.
4. A Workshop on Liturgy (as support from the IMU) for the (Waldesian) Presbyterian Assembly to be carried out on May 20th 2007 in Mercedes.
5. **Celebrarte – Preparing materials for advent** with workshops of
 - a. liturgical animation
 - b. music
 - c. dance and body expression
 - d. liturgy
 - e. decoration
 - f. compositions
6. The creation of a Liturgy Commission (up to Celebrarte the same commission of the Pastoral Retreat continues, then a new commission will be chose that will include all the mentioned areas)
7. Workshops on sacraments of the Methodist tradition (for the pastors and deacons)
8. Workshops on cult and culture, creativity and body expression

9. To prepare materials for the 130 years of the IMU
10. To prepare a Liturgical Calendar for 2008.
11. To keep on building bridges with the Music Secretary.

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