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Celebrating the Easter Vigil:
What Sort of Theology of Creation is Shaped by our Worship?

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Celebrating the Easter Vigil:
What sort of theology of creation is shaped by our worship?
A critical ecofeminist reading

by

Carmen Diston, IBVM

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Theology,
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
<i>Lex orandi, lex credendi</i> <i>Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi</i> The Easter Vigil and its potential for liberating praxis	
Chapter	
1 Liturgical Theology: The Approach of Aidan Kavanagh	10
Liturgy and Liturgical Theology Aidan Kavanagh: <i>Theologia Prima</i> Aidan Kavanagh: <i>Theologia Secunda</i> Language and Function of Liturgy Relationship between Liturgy – Church – World	
2 Ecofeminism: the Contribution of Anne Primavesi	20
Ecofeminism Anne Primavesi: Paradigms An Ecological Paradigm A Hierarchical (and Christian) Paradigm	
3 Celebrating the Easter Vigil: Shaping a Theology of Creation	31
Part One: Context Cosmic and Temporal Dimensions Development of the Easter Feast Aesthetic Language of the Easter Vigil	
Part Two: The Easter Vigil 54 Language of Symbol and Metaphor Shape of the Easter Vigil Service of Light Liturgy of the Word Liturgy of Baptism Liturgy of the Eucharist	
Conclusion	96
Bibliography	105

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores celebration of the Easter Vigil as it shapes a theology of creation and asks whether it is liberating, life giving, for women and the earth. The exploration is firmly rooted in the centuries old adage *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. There is a dynamic relationship between praying, believing and living; to worship is to do theology and shape living. The Easter Vigil with its unique elements of Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist is a privileged place for this exploration and offers breadth to the exploration through its temporal and cosmic dimensions, proclamation of the Word and celebration of initiation.

There are two points of departure for this work: liturgical theology and ecofeminism. Aidan Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology – in particular his attention to experience, his conviction that the church's prayer founds believing, his identification of two movements of theology (*theologia prima and theologia secunda*) – supports this study. So the Easter Vigil is explored in its celebration. Liturgy (as enacted rites) shapes and transforms the participants. The contemporary discipline of ecofeminism provides the criteria for assessing whether the Easter Vigil in shaping a theology of creation is liberating for women and the earth. Ecofeminist Anne Primavesi in her book *From Apocalypse to Genesis* surfaces an ecological paradigm and a hierarchical paradigm. This thesis considers how, or if, each functions in celebrating the Easter Vigil.

A functioning ecological paradigm supports interrelationship, organic exchange between systems and supports all life. A hierarchical paradigm supports an approach to life that is mechanistic, detached and supports gender inequality, patriarchy and dualism.

This thesis proposes that attention to cosmic dimensions such as spring equinox, full moon, night and Sunday, and attention to earth symbols such as fire, water, oil, bread and wine may help Christians to live ecologically and according to feminist values, and to similarly influence the society in which they live. It also proposes that in celebrating the Easter Vigil, Christians shape a world that is deeply hierarchical (rooted in patriarchy, gender bias and dualism) and thus not life giving for women and the earth.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian tradition, in its liturgy and most especially in celebrating the Easter Vigil, can open up to an ecological way of living. In celebrating the Easter Vigil, Christians shape a theology of creation that is dynamic and moving. Such a theology of creation is first about experience and activity, being and acting, and consequently about belief. In celebrating the Vigil we “do the world,” creation is in-the-making. Dating, nighttime and temporality point to the Easter Vigil’s thoroughly cosmic dimensions. The structure of the Vigil is centred around four actions: igniting a new fire and its enveloping light, proclamation and witness of the Word, immersion in water and anointing with oil, eating bread and wine. Not separate isolated actions, these are interconnected and function as part of one whole movement that is the paschal mystery, a movement or passage from slavery to freedom, from death to resurrection. “The vigil is ... a night of hard work wherein we undertake the construction of a new world and a new humanity.”¹ The kind of world/creation opened up is of central importance. This thesis asks whether it is liberating for women and the earth.

Through a renewed reading and celebration of the Easter Vigil, one that pays attention to its inescapable cosmic underpinnings, to its language of symbol and metaphor, to its temporal dimensions, and to its ritual action, the assembly of God’s people are

¹ Nathan D. Mitchell, “Re-creating the World: A Meditation on the Easter Vigil,” in *Catechumenate*, 22/2 (March 2000), pp. 3-4.

continually shaped into God's new creation. Attention to cosmic dimensions such as spring equinox, full moon and night, and attention to earth symbols such as fire, water, oil, bread and wine may help Christians to live ecologically and according to feminist values, and to similarly influence the society in which they live. To say so makes three important assumptions. First there is a relationship between liturgy and theology; to worship is to do theology. Second, there is a relationship between liturgy, theology and life; worship not only shapes theology but also living. We strive for integration of and in praying, believing and living. Third, the Easter Vigil has the potential for liberating, transforming praxis, but is not beyond critique. Ecofeminism can both critique the Christian tradition and open up that which is liberating in Christian liturgical praxis. A brief exploration of these assumptions will help set the stage for the work of this thesis.

Lex orandi, lex credendi

Liturgy and theology have always been partners in the journey of Christian living, even if the dynamic of that relationship changes and shifts over time. Like a diamond, the nature of this relationship is multi-faceted. The hardest of gems, a diamond is durable, long-lasting. When found in the ground there are cracks and breaks, and the presence of other materials adhering. Fired, purified, its edges cut and shaped, the diamond appears as a stone of beauty, simplicity and integrity. It absorbs light and refracts brilliance. The relationship of liturgy and theology admits of crevices and pitfalls, of highs and lows, of many colours and forms. It takes up and reflects the activity of the Holy One. Today it is precisely openness to all aspects that is necessary for dialogue and which must guide reflection. Neither liturgy nor theology must be made to do what it was not meant to do, or

unduly influence and shape the other. The Latin tag *lex orandi, lex credendi* is used to lay claim to the integral relationship between liturgy and theology, praying and believing.² The dynamic is variously described as moving from liturgy to theology, theology to liturgy, or something more fluid. In a very general way it can be said that Geoffrey Wainwright puts emphasis on text as a starting point; Alexander Schmemmann focuses on *Ordo*, the corpus of liturgy; Aidan Kavanagh begins from experience.

The British Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright explores the *lex orandi, lex credendi* dynamic in his book *Doxology*.³ While his work is considered a classic systematic theological study and an example of emphasizing doctrine in the worship-belief dialogue,⁴ a choice was made not to explore that avenue in this thesis.

Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann claims an organic relationship between liturgy and theology. He finds that there has been a divorce in the twentieth century of theology from liturgy and piety (spirituality), a divorce he attributes in part to a western worldview and approaches to theology.⁵ In doing liturgical theology, Schmemmann seeks to restore a lost integration of liturgy, theology and piety. The conversion would be a matter of heart and life because the problem, as he sees it, lies not with the liturgy, but with our

² This adage has its roots in the Gallican monk Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390-463) who, in the patristic era's debate against semi-pelagianism, cited the church's worship to defend a position on grace: *ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*. Paul De Clerck provides an examination of the 'original sense' of this adage by exploring Prosper of Aquitaine's religio-historical context. He then briefly describes later usage of the adage. See Paul De Clerck, "*Lex orandi, lex credendi*: The Original Sense and Historical Avatars of an Equivocal Adage," *Studia Liturgica*, 24 (1994), pp. 178-200.

³ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology* (London: Epworth Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁴ A summary understanding of Wainwright's approach is found in Maxwell Johnson, "Liturgy and Theology," in *Liturgy in Dialogue: Essays in Memory of Ronald Jasper*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1993), pp. 210-218.

⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, (1969), pp. 219-221.

approach. Theology is about a living faith attempting to express Truth.⁶ For Schmemmann the church's liturgy is epiphany of her faith, "of her experience in Christ of herself, the World and the Kingdom."⁷ His is a dynamic understanding of the church's *orandi* and *credendi*.

For liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanagh, the church's prayer founds believing. Kavanagh echoes the primacy Prosper of Aquitaine gives to worship, more specifically the church's *lex supplicandi*. Kavanagh, in his seminal work *On Liturgical Theology*, describes supplication as euchological petition and as central to worship.

This is the nub of the reason why the *lex supplicandi* founds and constitutes the *lex credendi* and is therefore primary for Christian theology. The way Christians believe is, somehow, constituted and supported by how Christians petition God for their human needs in worship.⁸

The church's prayer founds its believing; to worship is to do theology. Belief and theology are not static bodies of information, but rather dynamic realities. Kavanagh poetically sets out this relationship and dynamic. For Kavanagh, the person or community engaged in liturgy is also engaged in theology, a process of encounter, change and adaptation. Both are actions grounded in the incontrovertible connection between liturgy, church and world. Liturgical theology thus seeks to understand what a community *does* in enacted rites and secondarily what is uncovered by an analysis of those rites.⁹

The space for the meeting of community and enacted rites is experience: we bring ourselves – our whole selves – to liturgy, to the encounter with God, and in that exchange we are transformed. The word "experience" must be carefully understood. Experience is not to be solely equated with the feeling impact of an event. Rather, experience takes

⁶ Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology," pp. 218-219.

⁷ Schmemmann, "Liturgical Theology," p. 222.

⁸ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1984), p. 134.

⁹ David Fagerberg, *What Is Liturgical Theology? A Study in Methodology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 9.

account of the whole person: body, spirit and mind. Experience has many aspects: physical, spiritual, affective and cognitive. What I think, feel and do are all in the mix. As a feminist I believe that we must at least begin from experience, and pay attention to women's experience in particular for it has been silenced, devalued and ignored. But to speak of "women's experience" is to open up the parameters still further. Experience (now as something reflected upon) takes into account historical, social, economic and political location.¹⁰

While one could argue for a particular approach to the *lex orandi, lex credendi* dynamic,¹¹ Kavanagh's approach to the activity of liturgical theology has been chosen as most suitable for an exploration into how celebration of the Easter Vigil provides the ground for or shapes a theology of creation. A lengthier consideration of his work will follow in the next chapter. His focus on experience as the starting place has much to recommend it.

Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi

A sometimes forgotten relationship is that between worship, belief and acting in the world; we strive for an integration of praying, believing and living. This then is the second assumption: that there is a relationship between liturgy, theology *and* life. What we transact in worship not only has consequences for how we live, but is the way we live; our praying founds our living. Indeed the church's liturgy is its work or public action, its *leitourgia*. This classical Greek word has two roots, *laos* and *ergon*, meaning a work

¹⁰ Pamela Dickey Young, "Women's Experience as Source and Norm of Theology," in *Feminist Theology - Christian Theology: In Search of Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 49-69. In this article Dickey Young explores the breadth of women's experience and how it is a source for theology. She understands women's experience to mean the reflection that comes from knowing self, as subject, and in relation to all reality. Theology she understands as serious and critical reflection and so distinct from Christian praxis.

¹¹ Maxwell Johnson, after describing three different approaches, seems to favour the work of Edward Kilmartin as calling for prayer and belief to be held in dialectic tension so that focus on one does not exclude the other. Johnson, "Liturgy and Theology," pp. 226-227.

undertaken on behalf of the people. *Leitourgia* denoted a public work or project for the good of the community, and a civil service. Early on *leitourgia* acquired a particularly Christian meaning and usage. Paul refers to himself as “a minister [*leitourgon*] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (Rom. 15:16); the Greek Old Testament uses *leitourgia* to refer to the work of the Levites; *leitourgia* also refers to the priestly work of Christ (Heb. 8:2). The Second Vatican Council describes liturgy as “the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed [and] the fount from which all her power flows.”¹²

As with the relationship between praying and believing, there are different ways that liturgy and life interact. L. Edward Phillips in his article “Liturgy and Ethics” describes some of the approaches that have been taken.¹³ Liturgy may be taken as a source providing a norm and motivation for action. Liturgy is sometimes presented as describing what we ought to do; it functions as a proof-text. Liturgy can also be treated as an object of critique to see how it reflects ethical living (whose criteria are externally defined) or a tool to promote such ethical living.

Catherine Vincie looks at liturgy as an object of ethics while arguing for an integral relationship between liturgy, theology and living.¹⁴ She talks about liturgy as orthopraxis and says: “by our actions we become who we are.” At the same time she cautions against an instrumental notion of liturgy.

Kevin Irwin in his article “The Sacramentality of Creation and the Role of Creation in Liturgy and Sacraments”¹⁵ sees liturgy (understood as texts, ritual and enacted rites) as a source for theology. He privileges liturgy as a source for creation theology citing its

¹² *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1975), #10.

¹³ L. Edward Phillips, “Liturgy and Ethics,” in *Liturgy in Dialogue: Essays in Memory of Ronald Jasper*, ed. Paul Bradshaw and Bryan Spinks (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1993), pp. 88-101.

¹⁴ Catherine Vincie, “The Cry for Justice and the Eucharist,” in *Worship*, 68/3 (May 1994), pp. 194-209.

¹⁵ Kevin Irwin, “The Sacramentality of Creation and the Role of Creation in Liturgy and Sacraments,” in *And God Saw That it was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment*, ed. Drew Christiansen and Walter E. Grazer (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1996), pp. 105-146.

rootedness in human life and created things.¹⁶ It is therefore important to pay attention to the texts and to how liturgy is prepared and actually celebrated. In his article Irwin brings an ecological awareness to bear on liturgy and an evaluation of the adequacy of liturgical celebration. This is to pay attention to *lex vivendi*. One asks how creation is reflected in the text, prayer, action and material of worship. Irwin looks at how creation is used: for time of celebrations, as motivation to praise, the use and theological meaning of symbols.¹⁷ While he offers a positive assessment of liturgy vis à vis creation, Irwin names aspects that must be critiqued: prayer texts, symbolic engagement, hymnody, aesthetics, the primacy of the northern hemisphere experience, theology of the presentation of the gifts.

To see liturgy *as* ethics is to name an even closer relationship between the two. For Geoffrey Wainwright eucharist is an “enabling paradigm for our ethical engagement in the world.”¹⁸ He cites biblical texts that indicate a close connection between worship and living (e.g. Heb. 13:15-16; Rom. 12:1; Col. 3:17). Liberation theologians see liturgy as having the capacity to transform society;¹⁹ we enact in liturgy a new way of being with new relationships and values that transform the whole community and society. This is a work in which we cooperate and which is fundamentally under God’s gracious activity.

In this thesis two of these dynamics are operative. Following Kavanagh’s premise that to do liturgy is primary theology, one must argue for liturgy as ethics, for the transformative dynamic of liturgy. The moment of secondary reflection calls us to ask if liturgy is truly effective – what are the actual changes and consequences. Such a critique moves us to consider the how of liturgy and brings its own normative criteria. So the ecofeminist critique, for example, holds certain values and asks if liturgy can and does transform people and communities in that direction. So we ask what creation and way of

¹⁶ Irwin, “The Sacramentality of Creation,” p. 108.

¹⁷ Irwin, “The Sacramentality of Creation,” p. 112-124.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Wainwright, “Eucharist and/as Ethics,” in *Worship*, 62/2 (March 1988), p. 134.

¹⁹ See Sjaak deBoer, “The Transforming Power of Sacraments in Liberation Liturgy,” *Questions Liturgique*, 77 (1996), 257-269.

being is opened up in and through celebration of the Easter Vigil; is it liberating for women, children and the earth?

The Easter Vigil and its potential for liberating praxis

This brings us to the third assumption: that the Easter Vigil has the potential for liberating, transforming praxis, but is not beyond critique. Again, the Christian tradition, in its liturgy and most especially in celebrating the Easter Vigil, is capable of opening up an ecological way of being. Ecofeminism can both critique the Christian tradition and open up that which is liberating in Christian liturgical praxis. This will be demonstrated by drawing on the work of Anne Primavesi in her book *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, where she outlines the characteristics of ecological and hierarchical paradigms. She shows how the hierarchical paradigm is particularly operative in the Christian tradition. Attention to the cosmic dimensions of the Easter Vigil suggest that an ecological paradigm is also operative, pointing to and transforming us in a web of connection, interrelationship and interdependence with the earth and the whole cosmos. So this thesis will attempt to show the potential for liberating practice in the Easter Vigil as well as the patterns of a hierarchical, and thus non-ecological, way of living.

In this Master's thesis I am going to show that as liturgy shapes believing and living, liturgy does indeed shape a theology of creation. The Easter Vigil is a privileged locus for exploring how liturgy shapes a theology of creation. The critical lens of ecofeminism will help to evaluate whether such a theology of creation is life giving for women and the earth. Aidan Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology is a most suitable method for exploring how celebrating the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation. His approach to liturgical theology will be presented in chapter one. Chapter two will focus on two paradigms, ecological and hierarchical, as described and critiqued by ecofeminist

theologian Anne Primavesi. Chapter Three considers the Easter Vigil itself. Part one addresses context (time, cosmic dimensions, development, date, music and space) and part two, after a short exploration into symbol and metaphor, the celebration in its four movements: Service of Light, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of Baptism and Liturgy of the Eucharist. It will be seen that attention to the cosmic proportions of the Easter Vigil can strengthen an ecologically sound theology of creation. At the same time, there is much in the celebrating that reinforces a hierarchically based theology of creation that is not life giving for women – indeed all people – and the earth.

Chapter One

LITURGICAL THEOLOGY: THE APPROACH OF AIDAN KAVANAGH

Liturgy and liturgical theology are at the heart of an exploration of how the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation. As indicated earlier, it is Aidan Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology that sets the direction and approach to this question. For Kavanagh liturgy and theology are eminently practical, that is to say intimately connected to living in the presence and action of God in the world. Worship founds believing and living.

Liturgy and Liturgical Theology

Liturgy or *leitourgia* is the Christian people's work of praising God. Liturgy is faith activity; it is experience of mystery, understood as the experienced presence of the Holy moving towards a posture of praise and thanksgiving.¹ As such, liturgy has the power to shape belief, to transform lives and to affect living in the world/cosmos, for in it God and reality is named. Liturgy is about presence and action – God's and ours – in the Church and in the world;² each affects the other.³ In its celebration it is transformative of the world and people; it is a process of becoming. It is not an activity relegated to an hour on Saturday evening or Sunday morning bearing no further relationship to anyone or anything. In fact it will have consequences for more than those believers who gather to celebrate in

¹ Patrick W. Collins, *Bodying Forth: Aesthetic Liturgy* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992), pp. 22-23.

² Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 7-8.

³ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 60ff, 85-87. The relationship between liturgy and world is powerfully and succinctly described under the heading "The Sunday liturgy of Christians addresses itself primarily to the object of the assembly's ministry, the world" in Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1982), pp. 45-46.

particular times, places and occasions for they are part of a bigger reality than the Sunday assembly.

Liturgy is the work of communities who take seriously incarnation, that they are bodily creatures. In this way proclamation, listening, prayer, silence, music, ritual gestures, symbols, eating and drinking are all important in liturgical action. Liturgy, as enacted ritual, is central to believing. Liturgy is event, something we do, that we engage in, participate in at the invitation of the One who calls. Liturgy is therefore more than a text to be read or analyzed for how it might support the work of theology. Rather, in liturgy we do theology; through the ritual in which we participate, we come to understand in our very lives something about God and God's activity in us and in the world.

And what of "liturgical theology?" A classic definition of theology is "faith seeking understanding," the exploration and search for knowledge of and about God. It can result in the acquisition of a storehouse of information. Liturgy and theology have often met in the area of systematics, dogmatics and sacramental theology. It may be used as proof or source for belief. I in no way intend to diminish the importance of such theology but wish to show that Kavanagh's understanding of and approach to liturgical theology is quite different. For Kavanagh, liturgical theology is eminently practical, that is, rooted in the experience of liturgy, of liturgy as enacted work – *leitourgia*. Liturgy is about living in the presence of God; it is about the transformation and adjustment that occurs in this encounter.

Aidan Kavanagh: *Theologia prima*

Aidan Kavanagh is convinced that participation in liturgy changes or transforms persons, communities and the world, however slowly or imperceptibly. But more than participation, a liturgical act is a theological act. Theology is something practical and lived before it is ever theory. Liturgical action is *theologia prima*, first order theology. The

liturgical event encompasses three moments: encounter, change and adjustment.⁴ Christians encounter the living God in liturgy, in Word and sacrament. The liturgy of the Church is about God's presence and action affecting, gracing and changing the world. It is an encounter that transacts faith. Liturgy is also about our action in the world. Christians are about "doing the World" in liturgy; a World that is the dwelling place of the living God, that is fashioned according to the mind of God and Christ's dying and rising. It is a particular way of being in the world, and a world opened up. Liturgy, says Aidan Kavanagh in his seminal work *On Liturgical Theology*, is like the ground, founding and giving shape to a community and a world.⁵ Liturgy and living are intimately related.

Kavanagh begins his consideration of liturgical theology talking about world. Liturgy is a life of faith lived in the church and the world; it is encounter with God, entered into "*for the life of the world.*"⁶ Thus liturgy is rooted in lived experience, albeit of a particular kind. It is a life of grace and relationship in and with the living God whose presence affects, graces and changes the world.⁷ The ecofeminist asks what world do we speak of and what kind of life? Mary Catherine Hilker describes the feminist critical norm for theology with a question: "What will foster the full humanity of all women, men, and children as well as the well-being of all creation?"⁸ The critical norm for praxis and theology is that which is transforming, that which is liberating of women, the earth and the world.

⁴ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 73.

⁵ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 96-99. By way of example, Kavanagh shows how the Church's discipline of worship founded and shaped Augustine's evolving faith - if slowly, even imperceptibly. Liturgy shapes and transforms in subtle ways; we are often slow to recognize the change.

⁶ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 8. Emphasis mine. That liturgy is enacted "for the life of the world" is a recurring theme in Kavanagh's work. Cf. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998). For Schmemmann liturgy is *ordo*; through the church's sacramental life liturgy presents a worldview. Our *leitourgia* is to act in this world after Christ (p. 25). Eucharist is a journey or procession into the Kingdom, living into a new reality (p. 30). Sacrament implies transformation of the world (pp. 42-43, 81).

⁷ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 8.

⁸ Mary Catherine Hilker, "Experience and Tradition," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 72.

In the context of this thesis the *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* principle is focused toward the church's discourse on creation. How does liturgy, specifically the celebration of the Easter Vigil, shape a theology of creation? And is that liturgy "for the life of the world," that is, is it liberating for women, children, men and the earth? It is entirely appropriate to bring together liturgy, feminism and ecology in search of a theology of creation. To do so is no less than to claim a relationship between our praying, our believing and our living, thus *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.⁹

For Kavanagh liturgy is an action that may take the community (Kavanagh's focus is on the community, not so much the individual) to the brink of chaos. For him, the community's changed condition is unpredictable and not directly related to the artfulness (or not) of the celebration, important as this is. I believe we are brought to the brink of chaos when our world, our lived experience, clashes with the world presented in liturgy. There is a personal as well as community appropriation that takes place as a settling into the depth of the action occurs. It is in the synthesis of these realities that adjustment to the encounter takes place in actions large or small, conspicuous or not. *Theologia prima* is thus a "dynamic, critical, reflective, and sustained act."¹⁰

Theologia prima, is – to borrow from Paul Ricoeur – a mimetic activity.¹¹ In the liturgy, our living, acting and suffering (that is undergoing) of the mystery of Christ, our

⁹ Kavanagh's understanding of the dynamic of liturgical theology can find a support in the work of systematic theologian Paul Ricoeur. For Ricoeur the liturgical action is a place of play and imagination involving the whole person. It is a place where we allow ourselves to be grasped and taken up in new possibilities, in new ways of being, a place where God with us is creating a World. The liturgy provides the ground and shape of this world in which we play. "To play ... is to play at something. In entering a game we hand ourselves over, we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning which holds sway over the reader." Such playful activity produces a change, a transformation such that we become our truest selves; we become most fully Church doing the World. See Paul Ricoeur, "Appropriation," trans. and ed. John B. Thompson, in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 91.

¹⁰ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 77.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Time and Narrative: Threefold Mimesis," in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 52-87. Very simply put, mimesis has to do with imitation of action such that one moves to a world of action that is ever new. The language of symbol both configures and refigures experience.

living in / doing the world, is ontologically changed. In the encounter with the living God we bring ourselves, our lives in all their complexity, and are changed. So too is the liturgy itself, no one celebration is the same because of the continuing adjustment that takes place.

Aidan Kavanagh: *Theologia secunda*

Liturgical acts, says Kavanagh, constitute and shape discourse.¹² *Theologia secunda* is our critical reflection upon this adjustment and its expression in language. This process of critical reflection is an academic activity that in the west, according to Kavanagh, lost its moorings, grounding, in liturgy. He suggests the academy has overtaken the work of theology – to theology’s impoverishment. Kavanagh acknowledges the gains that have been made through the emphasis given to academic theology, but points out the often unaccounted losses: the focus of ministry moves from service to profession; homiletics becomes less the hearing and proclamation of the Word and more an occasion for the “qualified” to educate; sacraments rather than encounters become abstract ritual expressions.¹³ Today we name right doctrine orthodoxy. Doctrine and teaching are detached from worship. However, *orthodoxia* in its original sense, in the early church, is about worship as a way of living. It is a life that is truly one, holy, catholic and apostolic: “a life of communion in all God’s holy things and among his holy persons.”¹⁴ For Kavanagh liturgy is *orthodoxia* and as such must embrace both worship and belief, together. The criteria, says Kavanagh, for *orthodoxia*, is “God’s alarming Word in Christ.” It is to regard the world, as we know it, “abnormal.”¹⁵ Liturgy presents a new world-in-the-making. Ecofeminism will be a good partner to bring to the work of *theologia secunda* for it is concerned about lived reality, about systems and ideologies as they affect living. It

¹² Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 85-87.

¹³ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 82.

¹⁴ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 159-160.

seeks the inter-connectedness of living things and persons, the connections between how we think and how we act.

Language and Function of liturgy

Liturgy is an act of communication, and like any language or form of communication, it has a structure. To speak of the language of liturgy is not to be concerned about the texts of liturgy in themselves, but rather what the whole action produces – a World.

Symbol and metaphor belong to the language of liturgy, as do word, gestures and ritual action. Kavanagh says that the symbolic is the fundamental language of Christianity, of liturgy and church.¹⁶ He believes that text has supplanted rite and symbol as vehicle of God's Word.¹⁷ The language of symbol and metaphor will be addressed at great length in chapter three, part two. This will aid the exploration of the Easter Vigil as it shapes a theology of creation.

Kavanagh outlines the characteristics of how liturgy functions; it is social, doxological, festal, historical, aesthetic, canonical and eschatological.¹⁸ Liturgy, like language, is a social or ecclesial transaction, an adjustment to change in a society. More than a production of meaning, a change in being is transacted. Liturgy is dynamic and relational. As such it is *of* God, doxological, rather than *about* God, doctrinal. Its festal character is reflected in time, seasons and events; it has a calendar. Liturgy has a historical dimension that is formal and enduring. Aesthetics are important: liturgy is enmeshed in space and time having spatial, sonic, visual and kinetic elements.¹⁹ It is repetitive and rhythmic, also unifying. At the same time it is canonical or rule governed; it is scriptural,

¹⁶ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁷ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 104.

¹⁸ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, throughout chapters six and seven.

¹⁹ The aesthetics of liturgy is of great importance. The space and music of liturgy shape theology as does ritual and word. This will receive further treatment in the next chapter.

baptismal, eucharistic, ministry. Finally it is eschatological or about survival – life; it is in time yet beyond time.

Some of these ideas are also found in the work of Alexander Schmemmann who, like Kavanagh, sees a continuity of who we are, with the world and with God. He asserts that in our present separation from world, we "ceased to see [our] whole life depending on the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God."²⁰ For Schmemmann, the world is profoundly sacramental, infused with God, the place of God's epiphany.²¹ Our response is in our nature as *homo adorans*. Schmemmann sees liturgy as Christocentric and in that way cosmic (all creation in Christ), historical and eschatological (all time in Christ). In this way we are participants of the Kingdom. "Worship is by definition and act a reality with cosmic, historical, and eschatological dimensions, the expression thus not merely of 'piety', but of an all-embracing 'world view'."²²

The social, doxological, festal, historical, aesthetic, canonical and eschatological elements of liturgy are of course evident in the Easter Vigil. The community celebrates in time and cosmic space, year after year in similar fashion. It takes place in a particular physical space incorporating sight, sound and movement. The Vigil is sacrament and points forward to an ever-new world.

The Relationship between Liturgy – Church – World

Thus we come to a fundamental and perhaps little recognized truth: the intimate connection between liturgy and world. Many people live as though liturgy equals "Mass" equals what occupies them for an hour on Sundays, or what marks significant life events such as birth, marriage and death. For other people, liturgy is a source of strength and

²⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 18.

²¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 120.

²² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, p. 123.

nourishment for their life. This view is over-generalized but none-the-less real. There are two difficulties here: a too narrow understanding of liturgy and a lack of openness beyond self. In fact liturgy is much more than the "Mass" or a marker of life events; it is more than a gift for me in my life, important and valid as all of these are. Where do people perceive the call to come from that directs how we are to live in the world? What might people say, how might they live and act, if as Kavanagh and Schmemmann argue, they were to believe that liturgy is about making a world, that for a moment we live as though fully the City of God, the Kingdom of God?

Aidan Kavanagh writes: "Christian worship swims in creation as a fish swims in water"²³ and liturgy and theology must therefore take account of the world. Creation is therefore worship's home and ambience, its very being and life. Creation/world is central to liturgical theology; theology is meaningless if it does not take account of the world. Thus it is no small wonder that Kavanagh spends the first half of his book treating world, church and "church doing world" before he talks specifically about liturgical theology. What are these realities of which he speaks?

Church, for Kavanagh, is "God in Christ enworlded."²⁴ The Church is rooted in the cross of Christ and shapes us as it projects a world, a way of being. It is the world made new in Christ,²⁵ existing not for itself, but in and for the world.²⁶ Church is activity, not a static object. Its life is rooted in scripture, teaching and fellowship; its focus is mission.²⁷ While it is difficult today to appreciate Kavanagh's glowing account of fifth century liturgy as a touchstone for "church doing world" he does teach us that there should be congruence and integrity of relationship between the two rather than separation.

²³ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 4.

²⁴ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 15.

²⁵ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 42.

²⁶ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, pp. 44-45.

²⁷ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 54.

World is central to liturgy. For Kavanagh, world frames church, or cosmology is the foundation for ecclesiology. So how we see the world is important. Sometimes the world is treated as an object to be governed and utilized for humanity's gains. Other views see the world as an object governed by forces over which humanity finally has little control. Ecologists see the world as a living organism whose parts are interconnected. For Kavanagh Christianity shows forth a world created by Some One, a world that is the playground of Wisdom.²⁸

This chapter has explored Aidan Kavanagh's understanding of *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda* as two movements of an integrated action. It has presented in summary form the language of liturgy, the language of community, time, space, symbol, sound, word and movement. Attention to this language will uncover how the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation. Finally this chapter considered the relationship between liturgy, church and world. Celebration of the Easter Vigil as the church's *leitourgia* is to engage in primary theology. It is a dynamic movement of encounter, change and adjustment taking place across the deep structure of ritual action and shaping belief about creation/world. Kavanagh does not talk about creation, per se, except to hint at a link with world. This thesis will use the term creation where Kavanagh might use world.²⁹ The question is what kind of creation is opened up? If the Church then in its sacraments is "doing creation" how is that creation a reflection of the gospel? Asking these questions is to engage in *theologia secunda* our critical reflection upon the encounter, change and adjustment that occur in celebrating the Vigil. Across both movements of liturgical theology is a dynamic exchange between church and world-creation.

²⁸ Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, p. 23.

²⁹ Kavanagh makes the wonderful statement just mentioned above: "... cosmology is the foundation on which ecclesiology rests." But I find his sense of World needs broadening from the anthropocentric to the truly cosmological. To this end, exploration of present day understandings of cosmology, the universe story, would be helpful.

The task now is to present a second lens through which to eventually read and critique the theology of creation that is shaped in celebrating the Easter Vigil. That lens is ecofeminism.

Chapter Two

ECOFEMINISM: ANNE PRIMAVESI

Aidan Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology demonstrates that liturgy shapes believing and living. It follows that celebrating the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation. The second major movement of this thesis is ecofeminism. It will look at and critique the theology of creation that arises from celebrating the Easter Vigil. What kind of creation is opened up? Is it life giving for women – indeed all people – and the earth? Given that we are talking about creation, how do we live in the face of ecological issues that daily confront us: exploitation, pollution, deforestation, genetic engineering, loss of species, racism? The list is endless. While ecofeminism can and does address such issues, the Vigil itself will not give specific answers but may open up a way of living that will help humans address these issues.

Christian feminism has drawn our attention to the ways in which the Christian tradition supports patterns of domination and exploitation by way of its symbols, stories and ideology. Ecofeminism with its attention to ecology can serve as a critical lens that explores how celebration of the Easter Vigil shapes – or does not shape – a theology of creation that offers hope in our day for women (indeed for all people) and for the earth. To the degree that the values and activity of ecofeminism are part of one's experience it is a lens for *theologia prima*. In its more academic component it is a critical lens for the practice of *theologia secunda*.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a contemporary discipline¹ of the study of and resistance to the domination of women and the earth that involves analysis, critique, vision and praxis.² It seeks the transformation of ways of thinking and of the systems and structures that govern our social reality. It seeks ways of thinking that honour and value biological and human diversity, and structures that emphasise interrelationship. Ecofeminism brings together the analytical tools and life-affirming stance of feminism, and the ecology movement's consciousness and activism in the face of environmental destruction. While ecofeminism is not necessarily theological, theology is foundational for this work. Christianity in its theology, praxis and teaching has reinforced the domination of women and the earth. While some women find the tradition so mired in patriarchy that it is impossible to revision, I believe the Christian tradition, in particular its celebration of the Easter Vigil, for all its inadequacy can offer a word of hope and promise.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a feminist theologian of world renown, outlines two spheres of ecofeminist dialogues: the cultural-symbolic and socio-economic.³ The cultural-symbolic layer is ideological, the effects of which are seen in social and economic realities. The cultural-ideological level identifies the linkages between the domination of women and

¹ Heather Eaton, Canadian ecofeminist theologian, sees a wider role for ecofeminism. She writes: "It can be represented as a lens through which *all* [emphasis mine] disciplines are examined and refocused." Heather Eaton, "Ecofeminist Liberation Theologies" (University – GH Essen: LAUD, 1999), no. 478.

² Heather Eaton, "Ecological-Feminist Theology," in *Theology for Earth Community*, ed. Dieter Hessel (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 77.

³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 97-112. In this chapter she details the rise of the domination of women and earth.

the domination of nature, systematized in patriarchy. The social-economic sphere engages in political, social and economic analysis to address the effects of patriarchy and the related oppressions of race and class. Her analysis and re-visioning of the Christian tradition is monumental. However, for this thesis, the work of Anne Primavesi will be more helpful.

Anne Primavesi: Paradigms

In her book *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity*,⁴ Anne Primavesi describes two paradigms or world-views, the ecological and the hierarchical. A description of the ecological and hierarchical paradigms as explored by Primavesi and a consideration of how they function will provide the necessary tools to view the Easter Vigil through an ecofeminist lens. As Primavesi presents it, the ecological paradigm is based on interrelatedness and interdependence. The hierarchical paradigm is mechanistic and patriarchal. A simple chart illustrates the characteristics of each:

An ecological paradigm	A hierarchical paradigm
- organic	- detached, observing, separated
- interconnected ecosystems	- mechanistic, utilitarian systems
- participative	- hierarchical, dualist
- meta-size relationships	- gender inequality
- fluid exchanges between systems	- patriarchal
- interdependent and subtly balanced relationships	

These paradigms will be explored more fully below.

In her book Primavesi works at the level of ideology and notes its effects in the socio-economic sphere and in the Christian tradition. She explores the link between woman and Nature, and the treatment of both in a male-dominated culture by attention to

⁴ Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

gender inequality, patriarchy and hierarchical dualisms. She exposes the consequences of the Christian tradition's absorption and support of the hierarchical paradigm by attention to the structure of relationships within the church; God's transcendence; religious utilitarianism, absolutism and fundamentalism; a particular understanding of salvation-redemption; canonicity and therefore the language of liturgy. She criticises the Christian tradition's interpretation and transmission of the Genesis story, particularly in the prevailing themes of fall/redemption, sin/salvation, and atonement. She offers a striking rereading of Genesis 1-3 within an ecological and eschatological vision. While these themes are most appropriately dealt with in the area of systematic theology, and are not the focus here, the two paradigms Primavesi presents assist the work of this thesis.

An Ecological Paradigm

"Ecology as a practical discipline is generally defined as the study of organisms in their environments, their "homes." The root word *eco* means, in fact, house or home."⁵ For Primavesi ecology is a philosophy that seeks to understand the world as interconnected systems.⁶ Each organism and its environment is considered an ecosystem; the human body is one such system. The ecological paradigm is based on the interrelatedness and interdependence of many homes or systems. Each and every ecosystem is dependent on and related to other environments and systems for its survival. Each system has a part to play in the living whole called Earth. All this is evident today. Temperatures of the Gulf Stream affect weather patterns on every continent. Air born pollutants cross national

⁵ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 7.

⁶ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, pp. 7, 25.

boundaries. War on Iraq, SARS and BSE: all have an impact on trade, travel, economies, psyche and worship, on a worldwide scale.

An ecological paradigm demands that we be conscious about cultivating an awareness of how our own ecosystem works and how it is connected to other systems even beyond our imaginings. An ecological paradigm demands that we constantly cross contexts, disciplines and boundaries; that we see the interrelation of cultural, intellectual, biological, social and industrial ecosystems. The complexity of systems demands that we live in a certain amount of recognised unknowing, that our descriptions of complex relationships are almost always partial and inadequate. There is always more than what meets the mind's eye. A gap exists between our perceptions, meaning and language.⁷ We never know or speak the whole truth, but must strive towards ever greater knowing and truth. Further, there are always events that we are unaware of, but that have an impact on systems and their relationships. All of this amounts to what Primavesi calls an *ecological humility* that must guide our living. "We are, [she writes], part of an immense complexity of subtly balanced relationships."⁸

Primavesi looks at the interconnectedness of ecosystems on a global scale and demonstrates the effects of events in one sphere on another, of decisions taken in one sphere on another. She provides an example of this interconnectedness, of the meta-relations that exist: the women of Khirakot in Northern India who campaigned against a soapstone quarry that "spoiled their village forest, their cultivated fields, their drinking

⁷ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 20.

⁸ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 22.

water and their footpaths [so vital for travel].”⁹ Here the presence and influence of Western technology, business interests, markets, and economic principles significantly impacted the shaping and effects of the quarry business. Were it not for the actions of the women of Khirakot, none of these would have been considered in relation to the others. The quarry itself appeared insignificant but in the larger picture had important consequences for the life and health of individuals and a whole community.

The Christian must wonder what pathways exist between it and the world, Nature, other religions, social, economic and political concerns. To what extent do Christians see themselves and their worship as connected to other systems and bearing implications for acting and living? One has only to consider the SARS outbreak in Toronto and the consequent changes to the celebration of Eucharist in Christian churches across Ontario.

A Hierarchical (and Christian) Paradigm

Primavesi argues that euro-western culture and Christianity do not support an ecological paradigm. The scientific revolution wrought a profound change in how humans view and live in the world – as detached observers of a world outside our selves. This non-participating consciousness knows things only at a distance, and as objects to be observed. Moreover the general approach to this world is mechanistic and utilitarian. The earth, stripped of its identity as subject, has no life force and dignity of its own; it “exists” solely for humanity’s use and benefit. The earth is no longer a reality that we participate in, much less a “home” where we live and where all life is sustained. Primavesi recognizes that we need plant and animal life to survive; it is valuing a utilitarian approach over an organic one

⁹ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 8.

that she decries, for all life forms, humans included, become objects, users and/or units of production.¹⁰ She decries the privileging of human life to the exclusion of all other life.

Primavesi explores the link between woman and Nature and the treatment of both in a male-dominated culture, by attention to gender inequality, patriarchy and hierarchical dualisms. The hierarchical paradigm is a complex web of characteristics that together support this solid, almost impervious, world-view. Those characteristics will be outlined in broad strokes, keeping in mind that the situation is much more complex than will be portrayed. Their importance lies in how they function together rather than in their origins.

Gender Inequality

We live in a world of gender inequality. On the biological level there are obvious sexual differences that we name male and female. There are also gender differences, where gender is understood as a social and cultural construction. Our western society (the one of which I can speak by reason of belonging) continues to hold more or less strictly defined gender roles, values and qualities. Gender inequality is rooted in the cultural separation of male from female, in the division of labour according to sex, and in the loss of the feminine component in language.¹¹ Coupled with this are both implicit and explicit devaluing, inferiorisation and subordination/domination of woman and all that is associated with her. In an industrial world with a utilitarian world-view women are ascribed less value because the measure of value (i.e. usefulness) is the production of goods to be bought and sold. The sphere of production is still dominated by men. "Women's work" for better or worse is not seen as a commodity to be bought and sold in the economic market.

¹⁰ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, pp. 14-17.

¹¹ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, pp. 27-30.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy¹² can be defined as a system of male authority and domination that has institutionalized sex-gender distinctions. It is a system wherein the male is deemed normative and accorded resources, property and privileges to the exclusion of women. Thus patriarchy is androcentric; it is the backbone of our social, political and economic institutions and carries grave consequences for women in particular. It is important to make a distinction here between androcentrism and anthropocentrism (human dominance in creation). Both of these are important in our critical reading of the Easter Vigil. It is Christian feminism that has a long history of critiquing androcentrism in western culture and the Christian tradition. It is ecofeminism in its attention to cosmological questions, which critiques anthropocentrism.

Hierarchical Dualisms

Hierarchy may be defined as a social condition, a system of classification and a state of consciousness where subordination and domination are written into human nature.¹³ Philosophically this system organizes reality in a classification of opposite and independent principles (e.g. mind/matter, good/evil). In the western intellectual tradition hierarchy has been coupled with dualism. The tension in dualities is solved through opposition and the weighting of one term over the other. Such polarizing results in either/or thinking. A male/female split encompasses all others; male and all that is associated with it is valued over female. These are some other dualities: nature and society, matter and mind, slave and

¹² For a detailed explanation of the rise of patriarchy, see Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

¹³ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 17.

free, black and white. Hierarchical dualisms have had and continue to have ontological, epistemological and social consequences.

Anne Primavesi shows how Nature and the Feminine have been linked in art, poetry, grammar, metaphor, and literature. To the female and Nature belong the “kindly” images of maternity, nurture, fruitfulness, passivity and marriage. The earth as mother gathers such metaphors as womb, nurse, virgin, seed, fertility and barrenness. Implicit is the presence of an active male whose relationship with the earth is “husbandry.”¹⁴ But another stereotypical image of Nature as female also prevails in Western culture: “wild and uncontrollable Nature that could bring on violence, storms, droughts and general chaos.”¹⁵ These conceptions, she argues, arose in and are perpetuated by a male-oriented culture. “Male attitudes toward Nature and woman have been accepted, consciously or not, as universally adequate, but can now be recognized as partial by feminists of both sexes.”¹⁶ Primavesi focuses her attention on the Nature/Culture dualism. She writes:

There is an internalization of an epistemological dualism which supposes opposition between necessity, located in the natural habitat (*oikos*), and freedom, located in the public domain (*agora*, or more broadly, the *polis* itself). Underpinning the supremacy of the *polis* in Greek thought was a more universal dualism: the supremacy of order (*kosmos*) over meaningless desolation (*chaos*).¹⁷

On the side of Nature, woman and body one finds the descriptors material, irrational, passive, dependent and immanent; on the side of culture, man and spirit are the descriptors immaterial, rational, active, independent and transcendent. The latter are highly valued, normative and holding the power to control. Male is dominant; nature and woman are subordinate.

¹⁴ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 34.

¹⁵ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 62.

¹⁶ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 35.

¹⁷ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 57.

In a patriarchal society, precedence is given to “objective, rational, scientific, detached and supposedly value-free thinking.” It discounts that which is seen as subjective and relational as “female, intuitive, bodily, illogical, emotional and disordered.”¹⁸ A chart may be helpful to summarize the Nature/Culture dualism:

Nature	Culture
- domain of <i>oikos</i> or natural habitat	- public domain or <i>polis</i>
- <i>chaos</i> or meaninglessness	- <i>kosmos</i> or order
- female	- male
- women, slaves, foreigners	- freeborn males
- house/domestic work	- wages work
- matter	- spirit
- irrational, passive, dependent, immanent	- rational, active, independent, transcendent
- subjective	- objective

Where hierarchy is added to this system (as it inevitably is), the second of the pair is always dominant, given priority and greater value in a mechanistic and utilitarian worldview.

What is of greater significance is the Christian tradition’s continued acceptance of hierarchical thinking and ordering. The documents of the Second Vatican Council, while presenting a renewed vision of church, are still clear that the church is hierarchically structured.¹⁹

For Primavesi, the Christian paradigm functions not as an intellectual reflection, but as myth. “Myths function as the building materials of reality, connecting mind and body, matter and spirit, people and their experience.”²⁰ Myths are meaning-making vehicles and as such have great influence to shape thinking, attitudes and patterns of acting. A hierarchical paradigm brings a particular consciousness and attitude towards the world:

¹⁸ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 61.

¹⁹ “*Lumen Gentium*,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1975), chapter three.

²⁰ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 87.

utilitarian rather than participative; objectification of the non-human world rather than an organic principle of all life; rooted in hierarchy and dualism rather than interrelated systems. This has been and continues to be destructive of women, children and the earth.

It is clear that an ecological way of living with its valuing and awareness of interconnected, organic relationships, of fluid exchange and interdependence will be life giving for women – indeed for all people – and the earth. A hierarchical paradigm marked by gender inequality, patriarchy and hierarchical dualisms has shown itself to be death-dealing for women and the earth. The next task, then, is to “read” the Easter Vigil and its celebration through the lens of ecofeminism.

Chapter Three

CELEBRATING THE EASTER VIGIL: SHAPING A THEOLOGY OF CREATION

Aidan Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology and Anne Primavesi's exploration of ecological and hierarchical paradigms are methodological tools for an exploration of how the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation. Kavanagh makes experience – the doing of ritual – the starting point and founding element for theology. Primavesi's exploration of ecological and hierarchical paradigms sensitises the participant in liturgy to those dynamics and provides at the same time tools for critical analysis. What emerges in our celebrating of the Easter Vigil is a theology of creation that is cosmic in its breadth, rooted in the stuff of earth, yet decidedly androcentric and hierarchical. Part one of this chapter will consider the Easter Vigil in its cosmic and temporal dimensions, dating and historical development, and aesthetics. In part two we see how celebration of the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation through light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist.

PART ONE: CONTEXT

Cosmic and Temporal Dimensions

The cosmic underpinnings of the celebration of Easter are unmistakable. Yet with the loss of an appreciation of and connection to creation, this cosmic context often goes unnoticed. From the earliest times humanity, God and nature are closely knit. Each stitch

counts or the whole unravels. Anscar Chupungco reminds us of what society has a tendency to forget: the symbolic mediation of the natural world.

For the ancient world nature was the locus of divine interventions and of human encounter with God. Nature and time were not only signs of God's dealings with people; they were symbols that embodied, manifested, and brought along his salvation. In short, they enjoyed a sacramental quality and played a sacramental role.¹

The cosmos (world of nature) with its times and seasons is the locus of revelation of divine mystery. Dorothy McDougall makes a stronger statement about the natural world:

The natural world must be recognized to have more than a symbolic value for the mediation of divine presence, as is suggested by the sacramental paradigm. The natural world has an innate value and not only reveals but also can be said to encounter divine presence as a *subject* of cosmogenesis and its processes.²

Attention to the cosmic in liturgy will only help us live ecologically if we consider the cosmos as subject rather than object, if we shift the Christian tradition's anthropocentric focus to a cosmic horizon.³

Experience of Time

And what of the locus and experience of time? Consider three ways of experiencing time: linear, cyclical, *kairos*. Our western and urban culture computes time in a scientific, linear and historical fashion. The time of day is given a numerical value; a numerical quantity of time is set aside for everything from coffee breaks to birthday parties, business meetings, religious services, holidays and social gatherings. The clock measures – even controls – time and human activity; there are rarely enough hours in the days, minutes in

¹ Anscar Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1992), p. 17.

² Dorothy McDougall, "The Cosmos as Primary Sacrament: The Horizon for an Ecological Sacramental Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, 1999), p. 112.

³ McDougall offers an extensive treatment of sacramental theology's anthropological focus. The emphasis on and polarisation of the human subject effectively excludes attention to non-human creation. See "The Cosmos as Primary Sacrament," pp. 121ff.

the hour, seconds in the minute! Time is an object outside of us that lags, flies or escapes us.

Other experiences of time are associated with the cyclical motion of the cosmos, biological rhythms and a person's psychological state. Cycles of the sun and moon establish our pattern of year, month and day, as well as agrarian cycles of planting, growth and harvesting. The year and the day are related to the sun: the earth's movement around the sun marks the year, and the earth's movement on its axis in relation to the sun marks the day. The length of a month is the period between two full moons – it is determined by the movement of the moon in relation to the earth. The week on the other hand is a socio-religious convention of ancient origin and shared by many peoples. The biological rhythm of aging is linear in fashion; it follows a progression. Women's bodies, however, know a monthly – cyclical – rhythm in their menstrual cycle. We speak of seasons of our lives and seasons of the earth (be it fall, winter, spring and summer; or in the southern hemisphere rainy and dry seasons), of the flavour and experience of time in different cultures and settings (e.g. academic, civic, fiscal). Clearly cyclical and biological rhythms speak of an ecological paradigm that is organic and participative. These ways of experiencing time, cosmos and self have their own inner dynamic to be respected.

Time is multi-dimensional: past, present and future. The Israelites had a connection to cyclical time to the extent their festivals had origins in the rituals of ancient religions and peoples. For example, Passover has roots in two rites of spring: a pastoral feast of nomads and shepherds, and the harvesting of barley. The events of salvation history were grafted on to existing rites rooted in the movement of the seasons and the cycles of earth's dying and re-creation. The new meanings brought to such celebrations led to a break in cyclical

time. For Israel, and then for Christians, time came to be historicized in events that move forward in a linear fashion toward some moment in the future. Time carries an eschatological dimension. Each moment is new. But along the way a hierarchical paradigm takes over and caricatures cyclical time as moving in a vicious circle, and holding people hostage to the cycles of the cosmos. Instead of experiencing cosmos, earth and humanity as interconnected systems; humanity is separated into an over-and-against relationship. The biblical religions of Judaism and Christianity contributed gradually to a major shift in world-view, in understanding the experience of time and cosmos.

Christians speak of liturgical time with its special calendar, and understand time as *chronos* and *kairos*. Time has a predictable, regular forward movement (*chronos*), but it may also be fraught with deep meaning – a time of God's presence and action in particularly heightened ways (*kairos*). This latter is not to deny God's presence and action always and everywhere, yet there is variety in experience and some moments carry a different value and weight than others.

The time of the Easter Vigil is variable, connected as it is to solar and lunar movements. It is also *kairos* time; Christ has entered human and earth history in a decisive way, changing patterns and traditions forever. To celebrate *Pascha* on Sunday is to break with or add new meaning to a cyclical festival and notion of time. But cosmic time cannot be forgotten.

The celebration of Passover and its near relative Easter preserves a deeply symbolic relationship with a natural cycle that, like night and day, goes beyond the confines of one religious tradition to embrace the experience of all humanity through the ages from the most distant and unrecoverable past. Even though it is lost to our complete understanding, Jews and Christians have assiduously maintained the relationship with the spring full moon, answering voices that call

faintly across the millennia to the depth of our being, voices beyond our hearing but surely not beyond influencing us.⁴

This kind of reflection is surely testament to an ecological paradigm. In today's world of conflicts, enmity and ecocide we do well to recognise and strengthen the cosmic dimensions of the Easter Vigil, the connections the earth and its peoples share together.

Experience of cosmos

The time of the Easter Vigil in its origins and renewed form is night; since the fourth century the Vigil has been celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. Night, Sunday, full moon and spring equinox are vital cosmic elements of a celebration of the Easter Vigil.

Night

Augustine described this night as “the mother of all holy vigils, on which the whole world keeps watch” for Christ, our Light. In its origins and its restoration in 1951 the Easter Vigil is a night celebration that begins only after sunset and ends by daybreak.⁵ Night is the time of watching and waiting. The day begins on the previous evening and so through the darkness we wait for the dawning of the light – the sun. The full import of the coming of Christ our Light who destroys death and renews life can hardly be experienced in daylight. Creation and exodus spring forth from the dark of night; in this night vigil creation and exodus are brought together (cf. Isa. 59:9-10; Jer. 32:17-44; Neh. 9:6-36).⁶

⁴ Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 74-75.

⁵ “General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar (GNLYC),” in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), #21, p. 175.

⁶ Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, p. 88.

Sunday

The particularity of the Christian Pasch lies in its relation to the Lord's Day. If a direct link between Easter and Sunday is not possible,⁷ it can at least be pointed out that they share a common content: celebration of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Sunday is to Christians as the Sabbath is to Jews. From the first century Sunday is the Lord's Day. It is also seen as the "eighth day" of the week, giving an eschatological tone, ushering in a new time. In this way Sunday is taken beyond its confines as a human construct of measuring time and takes on new meanings. On this day Christians mark Christ's resurrection; it was celebrated with a eucharistic meal, hymns, prayers and readings. The emphasis on Sunday set Christians apart from their Jewish roots, but Sunday was marked from sunset to sunset, according to Jewish custom. Sunday is a weekly celebration of the paschal mystery. A tradition of celebrating Christian Pasch on Sunday existed in the earliest times.

Full Moon

Easter falls after the first *full moon* after the spring equinox. The moon, for ancients, was associated with abundance and fertility, with growth and generativity:

... for the duration of the cycle of the moon, twenty-nine days, closely approximates / the menstrual cycle in women. Women bear in their bodies the wonderful power to conceive life and to give birth and to nourish children. The moon influences not only human life but the seas and the soil as well. Its gravitational pull causes tides in the oceans of the earth. The moon governs agriculture, especially planting, in many societies, even in America at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁸

⁷ A variety of opinions exist on which came first, Easter or Sunday, and their relation to the feast of Passover and the weekly Sabbath. See Thomas J. Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 2nd ed., pp. 13-18. The importance for this paper is simply that the two feasts have at their heart the fullness of the paschal mystery.

⁸ Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality*, pp. 73-74.

Easter is a celebration of life and generativity, of fruitfulness.

While the moon signifies life, it is also about light. At the time of the equinox day and night are marked by the fullness of light, by continuous and uninterrupted light. Gregory of Nyssa speaks eloquently of the full moon:

Before the rays of the sun totally disappear, the moon rises on the other horizon to shed its light on the world. Before the moon completes its night journey, the brightness of the sun already mingles with the moon's remaining light. Darkness is thus completely absent on the night of the full moon because of the uninterrupted succession of the sun and the moon.⁹

Easter is about light, harmony and balance, and interdependence.

The spring equinox

The marking of the equinox is determined by a solar calendar. The equinox (vernal/spring and autumnal) marks that time when night and day are of equal length, when the sun lies directly over the equator. The Christian feast of Easter is set according to the spring equinox, the date of which in the northern hemisphere can vary up to five weeks.

The spring equinox symbolises the harmony and equilibrium associated with the beginning of creation. It has cosmological significance, marking the beginning of time, of (new) creation, of regeneration and renewal. Spring was often celebrated as a New Year festival. Mircea Eliade writes: "every New Year is a resumption of time from the beginning, that is, a repetition of the cosmogony."¹⁰ Indeed Hippolytus of Rome sees in the Christian Pasch a kind of New Year celebration. He says that among the Hebrews Nisan is the first month because it reflects the work of the creator, the blossoming of creation, the first-fruits. And he writes:

⁹ Cited in Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, p. 74.

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 54.

For my part, I do not disbelieve all this, but I feel, or rather I am certain, that it is rather because of the spiritual nature of the Pasch that it has been considered as the beginning, head, and leader of all times and all ages, this month of the Pasch in which this great mystery is accomplished and celebrated, so that just as the Lord is the first-engendered and firstborn of all beings intelligible and invisible, likewise this month which celebrates the sacred solemnity becomes the first of the year and the beginning of all ages.¹¹

For Hippolytus resurrection adds new dimensions to the significance of cosmic time. He sees a new beginning. This is different than Eliade's sense of a "*repetition* of the cosmogony" [emphasis mine]. Ecofeminists would talk about the *unfolding* of a universe story; the story is dynamic, with an ongoing forward movement. Here there is a link with a Christian way of speaking of time that could recognise cyclical movements of earth and seasons, but understands that something new has happened, and continues to, in Christ.

Development of the Easter Feast

Ancient religions and cultures had two springtime feasts that are important for this exploration: a nomadic/pastoral feast celebrated at night before leaving for the summer pastures, and an agricultural feast.¹² The festival among nomadic peoples included the sacrifice of the first of the flock, a young male lamb, smearing its blood on tent posts and eating its roasted flesh. Through this ritual shepherds sought protection and safety during the move from the winter station to summer pastures. Shepherds knew they would be vulnerable to the forces of nature – the activity of the gods. The feast was held in the light

¹¹ Hippolytus of Rome, "The Pasch History," in *The Paschal Mystery: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, ed. A. Hamman (Palm Publishers: Montreal, 1969), p. 57.

¹² A detailed explanation of the origins to the Jewish Passover can be found in A. Haag, "Pâque," *Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément*, Tome 6, commencé sous la direction de L. Pirot and A. Robert, continué sous celle de Henri Cazelles et André Feuillet (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1960), pp. 1119-1149. See also Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, pp. 12-17. Opinions vary on whether these represent two feasts or one; here the concern is more with the cosmic dimensions.

of the full moon during the night before departure, the moon being associated with abundance and fullness of life. Among more sedentary people, an agricultural feast developed during the ingathering of barley; the first sheaves were offered to the deity. This feast was often accompanied by a pilgrimage to the high places of worship. In some places it was associated with seven days of eating unleavened bread; the new harvest and new leaven symbolized the beginning of a new agricultural cycle, a cosmic rebirth.

New layers of meaning and historical events are grafted on to pagan spring festivals. Jewish Passover celebrates the eating of unleavened bread, the preparation for departure, the sacrifice of the first yearling lamb, the smearing of its blood on the door lintels for protection (see Ex. 12:3-14, 15-20; Lev. 23:5-8; Dt. 16:1-8; Joshua 5:10-11; Ezek. 45:18-24). Passover celebrates protection from and victory over death. It celebrates redemption from slavery and a final redemption with the coming of a messiah. Passover is essentially a domestic feast; the family unit is the heart and locus of the celebration. In the Passover time as a cosmic event is taken up in time experienced as historical event. Cosmic time recognises and celebrates the historic time of the Exodus event. Cosmic time and historical time interlock; creation and salvation come together; the Exodus is a "second creation."¹³

Celebrating what Christ has done in his death and resurrection, the Christian feast of Easter has its roots in the Jewish Passover. The relationship between the two is complex. Easter takes on dimensions of meaning from Passover. A Palestinian Targum, *Poem of the Four Nights*, speaks of creation, the binding of Isaac, deliverance and the coming of a Messiah in relation to Passover.¹⁴ These same themes, says Talley, are found in the

¹³ Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, p. 3.

Christian Pasch especially in its readings. He describes a thematic movement to new covenant and new creation celebrated in baptism.¹⁵ As spring is a day of re-creation, so the paschal mystery of Christ is marked by the spring equinox; the whole mystery of passion, death and resurrection is associated with this day. This association is quite clear in the homilies and other writings of the Church Fathers.¹⁶

Like the Jewish Passover, Easter is a springtime festival of passage, of Christ's passage to glory, a passage from death to new life, to new creation. As Chupungco says:

Spring is the mirror of cosmogony, because it reflects the renewal or rebirth of creation. The Fathers of the church saw in this natural phenomenon a graphic illustration of what takes place when the springtime of Christ's passover is celebrated by the church. As spring brings rebirth and salvation to nature, so it also brings the feast of Easter to the church. Spring acquires, so to speak, a sacramental character. It becomes the bearer of God's presence and of his wonderful deed in Christ.¹⁷

Chupungco describes how early Christian writers and the Church Fathers, whom he cites liberally in his book, noted the deep connection between spring and the mystery of Christ's passover. Easter at its heart is of cosmic dimensions.

While Chupungco speaks strongly of the metaphor of spring for Easter, nevertheless, he writes that it is the festal commemoration of Christ's death and resurrection that is pre-eminent. Chupungco goes so far as to say that in the southern hemisphere, where spring and Easter do not coincide, the symbols of spring ought to be omitted, "for indeed, every season of the year is the season of Christ's death and resurrection."¹⁸ Pfatteicher states that Easter does not celebrate spring, but rather in spring Christians see all

¹⁵ Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, pp. 48-50.

¹⁶ Citations can be found throughout Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*.

¹⁷ Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, p. 34.

¹⁸ Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, p. 39.

of creation witnessing and proclaiming the joy of Christ's resurrection; creation shouts forth in joy.¹⁹

Date for the Christian Pasch

The Christian Pasch has been seen in its connections to cosmic symbols of night, Sunday, full moon and spring equinox. Its roots are in the Jewish Passover, and in pagan spring rituals. In the early centuries the Christian Pasch was experienced as a unified celebration of passion, death and resurrection, the late second century Quartodeciman controversy notwithstanding.

The Quartodeciman controversy points toward a significant conflict in the dating of the Christian feast of Easter. The conflict pitted against each other those known as Quartodecimans (claiming to be rooted in the tradition of the apostle John) and those rooting themselves in the apostolic tradition of Peter and Paul, thus mostly centred on Roman practice. The Quartodecimans called for the paschal mystery to be celebrated annually on 14 Nisan – the first full moon of spring – regardless of the day of the week. Their concern was historical accuracy and continuity with their Jewish roots.

For the Quartodecimans the full moon on 14 Nisan was the decisive factor. It was the one element of the celebration that firmly laid hold of their Easter theology and spirituality. 14 Nisan showed, as no other cosmic element did, that the paschal victims in the Old Law had been replaced once and for all by the true paschal lamb who offered his life on the cross at the same time as these victims were being immolated in the temple. In a sense, 14 Nisan was witness to that event and now also a reminder of it.²⁰

¹⁹ Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality*, pp. 76-77.

²⁰ Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, p. 67. Other detailed explorations of the Quartodeciman controversy are found in Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, pp. 5-13 who proposes that the quartodeciman emphasis on the historicity of salvation was a reaction to gnostic dehistoricisation of salvation (pp. 12-13); and Stuart G. Hall, "The Origins of Easter," *Studia Patristica*, Vol. XV / *Texte und Untersuchungen* 128, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984-1985), pp. 564-567.

The church in Rome and other local churches celebrated *on the first Sunday* following 14 Nisan. While the former emphasised somewhat the saving death of Jesus the latter focused more on resurrection. But in fact, neither the Quartodecimans or the Romans excluded any dimensions of the paschal mystery; in each tradition, the passion, death and resurrection are seen as a whole. The gospel texts and the events they describe, give a breadth to the Easter mystery from messianic meal to the gift of the Spirit for the mission of the church.²¹ This is the mystery we celebrate annually at Easter, and weekly on Sunday. In essence and at its origin the Easter feast was a comprehensive celebration encompassing the full breadth of the mystery: from passion through glory.

The inconsistencies in calendars of the day and two practices concerning the date for Easter resulted in three difficulties: Easter could sometimes be celebrated twice in one year and never in another;²² if linked to a definite date in a calendar, 14 Nisan did not always fall on the full moon; there was the added difficulty of how to observe the paschal fast. The origin of the paschal fast lies in a three day fast before Jewish Passover and its appropriation in new traditions.²³ Jews and Christians alike forbade fasting on the Sabbath and so the fast ought to be broken by then, resulting in the possibility of a single day fast (practiced among some Quartodecimans) before the Easter feast.

To settle the Quartodeciman controversy about the date of Easter the Council of Nicea decreed in 325 that the date for Easter would be computed according to this formula: the first *Sunday* after the first *full moon* after the *spring equinox*. Efforts have been made,

²¹ Irénée Henri Dalmais, "Time in the Liturgy," in *The Church at Prayer IV*, ed. Aimé Georges Martimort, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1986), p. 12.

²² Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast*, pp. 47-49.

²³ For an exploration of the problem of the fast see Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, pp. 27-31.

for ecumenical and civil reasons, to set a fixed date for Easter, to create a perpetual calendar.²⁴ The Second Vatican Council was not opposed to such an idea so long as a seven-day week, with Sunday, is safeguarded and continues without interruption.²⁵ However, a fixed date for Easter would also remove any reliance on or relationship with the cosmic rhythms of nature. The human person and all of creation is more than a predictable mechanism. A fixed date for Easter would seem to emphasise human control and domination, and support a universe that is anthropocentric. An ecofeminist consciousness reminds us that this is not the kind of "church-doing-world" that can be supported. Rather, we live at a time when we need to be aware of the interdependence of all the subjects of creation; we need to live according to an ecological paradigm. Attention to the Easter Vigil's cosmic elements such as spring, vernal equinox, full moon and night, fire, water, oil, bread and wine may help us as Christians to live ecologically and similarly influence the society in which we live. Because liturgy engages us in its action, an action that in the Vigil is so dependent upon the cosmos, we would do well to experience and ponder our connectedness to the earth and universe. It is only in knowing our connectedness, rather than separation, that we will truly live ecologically. It is not about "treating the earth well" but about knowing our interdependence as subjects.

²⁴ Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year: Its history & its meaning after the reform of the liturgy*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 289-302.

²⁵ "A Declaration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on Revision of the Calendar," Appendix to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1975).

Beginnings of a larger festal cycle

Today the Easter Vigil is related to the larger contexts of the Sacred Triduum, Holy Week, and indeed the whole Lent-Easter-Pentecost cycle.²⁶ This general shape can be seen by the fourth century. The Vigil does not stand alone, but is part of one continuous movement, which begins Holy Thursday evening and ends with Evening Prayer on Easter Sunday. The Church rejoices in the paschal mystery for a full seven weeks and strengthened with the gift of the Holy Spirit is sent on mission. How did this liturgy come to be so integrally connected to other celebrations? How did a unified celebration expand to three days, a week, six weeks and a further seven weeks?

The *Didascalia Apostolorum* describes the quite simple shape of the earliest Christian Pasch: fasting; prayer, intercession and scripture readings; eucharist.²⁷ This was a vigil, a celebration that lasted through the night.

From early on baptism was part of the celebration of the Christian Pasch, but scripture and key texts of the second and third century leave questions about its relation to the Vigil.²⁸ The tone of 1 Peter might suggest a link between baptism and the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, but it is by no means explicit. Chapter seven of *The Didache* indicates that the early church practiced baptism with fasting beforehand, but it makes no mention of when such a celebration took place. Eucharist marked the Lord's Day (*Didache* 9-10,14). Tertullian relates baptism generally to the time of the Pasch and the

²⁶ Of interest for this thesis is the paschal vigil. The development of the Lent-Easter-Pentecost cycle is described in Pierre Jounel, "The Easter Cycle," in *The Church at Prayer IV*, ed. Aimé Georges Martimort, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1986), pp. 33-76. Evidence of extended periods of fasting before Easter and of thanksgiving after Easter can be traced back as early as the second century.

²⁷ *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments*, introduction and notes by R. Hugh Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 21:18-19.

²⁸ Talley explores this question citing the original sources: *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, pp. 31-37.

fifty-day period following it. A detailed account of baptism is found in the mid-second century text, *Apostolic Tradition* 16-23. Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel* lends credence to the position that such a celebration of baptism took place during the celebration of the Pasch.

The expansion of the Christian Pasch reflects in part its historicisation. By placing emphasis on the particular historical events of the paschal mystery Christians were able to counteract those who would overly spiritualise Christ's death and resurrection. To draw attention to the historicisation of the Christian Pasch is not to deny its profoundly sacramental character. More than a simple recalling of past events, a mystery is celebrated whose efficacy ought not to be questioned.

In the accounts of the pilgrim Egeria we see the beginnings of this historicisation at work. The Spanish pilgrim Egeria left a detailed account of her pilgrimage (381-384 C.E.) to Jerusalem and describes an expanded celebration of the Christian Pasch. Her diary makes it clear that by the end of the fourth century, baptism is a part of a paschal vigil that unfolds over several days. Talley provides a summary of her account.²⁹ Thursday noon marks the beginning of a specifically paschal fast, with a service of readings and celebrations at three different sites; the *lucernarium*³⁰ and an all night vigil and procession to Gethsemanee, fill out the day. Friday saw a morning veneration of the cross, further readings until evening office, followed by a night vigil at the tomb. The paschal vigil consisted of the

²⁹ Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, pp. 42-47. Talley cites selections from her diary.

³⁰ The ritual use of light (for practical and symbolic reasons) was common in pagan, civil and religious spheres. Jewish customs included a perpetually burning light in the temple sanctuary and a lighting of candles or lamps during festivals and meals, especially the Passover Seder. Christians continued these uses of lights (cf. Acts 20:8). The third century hymn *Phos Hilarion* interweaves metaphors of sun, light, Jesus Christ and the lights that shine at eventide (see full text in *The Catholic Book of Worship III*, #14G). When Eucharist was no longer celebrated in the evening, the lighting ritual became part of Evening Prayer or Vespers. In the Middle Ages we see the blessing of the Easter Fire and Paschal Candle.

lucernarium, a series of eleven readings interspersed with prayers and genuflection, baptism and eucharist. In these Jerusalem practices we have the origins of today's Easter Triduum. The vigil itself has all the elements of today's Vigil: fire/light, scripture, baptism and eucharist. Egeria's account also describes a period of preparation and a continuation of the feast to Ascension/Pentecost.

It is important not to move too quickly here. While figures like Ambrose and Augustine referred to a triduum of celebration, our present practice takes shape over the twentieth century. The centuries in between are marked by significant decline and only very recently restoration. The key points are outlined very briefly here.³¹ In the fourth century the Vigil occupies the whole night and concludes several days of celebrations. When in the sixth century the Vigil concludes before midnight, Sunday comes to have its own service. From the fifth-sixth century adult baptism wanes in favour of infant baptism, and that outside the Vigil; the period leading up to the vigil and the paschal fast begin to emphasise private penance over baptismal preparation. These two factors result in a separation of baptism from the Pasch, although the blessing of water during the Vigil continued.³² This separation is reflected theologically in a shift from understanding death and resurrection as Christ's victory over death / Satan, to Christ as the atoning victim for our sin.³³ In the mediaeval period the Vigil begins earlier and earlier; by the fourteenth century it begins in the morning of Holy Saturday. The 1570 *Missal of Paul V* makes a morning celebration mandatory. The cosmic symbolism of Sunday, of night, the light of

³¹ See Adam, *The Liturgical Year*, pp. 75-77; and Jounel, "The Easter Cycle," pp. 39-41.

³² Jounel, "The Easter Cycle," pp. 36-37.

³³ See Thomas Joseph Hennigan, *The Pasch in the Ancient Church* (Dissertationis ad Lauream, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thomas Aq. In Urbe, Rome, 1994), pp. 3-4, 82-86.

the full moon and candles are all but absent in the Vigil; interestingly, the Easter candle is retained, but in broad daylight!

The Easter Vigil had lost its roots, its moorings. The Vigil was no longer the culmination of days and weeks – services are added on Sunday. Gone were baptism and the powerful symbols of water, renewal and rebirth. Gone was the experience of night and moon. The unrestored Vigil is a good example of how bad things can get, of how a mechanistic and utilitarian approach separates the mind from the rest of experience. Rubrics take precedence over experience; canon takes precedence over need; text simulates incarnate meaning. Only in the mid-twentieth century is the integrity of the Vigil restored. This restoration is due, in part, to a rebirth in patristic studies, and to biblical, liturgical and theological renewal. In 1951 Pius XII allows an experimental return to night; the revision of Holy Week in 1955 makes a night celebration law and restores baptism to the Vigil. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* affirms the primacy of the paschal mystery in worship,³⁴ of Sunday for its weekly memorial and Easter for an annual celebration.³⁵ The revision of the liturgical year was called for.³⁶ In 1969 the *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar* restores the Vigil to its central place in the Triduum.³⁷

Aesthetic language of the Easter Vigil

We learned from Aidan Kavanagh that aesthetics belong to the deep structure of liturgy and thus have a bearing on the experience and celebration of liturgy. Or in other

³⁴ SC, 5.

³⁵ SC, 102.

³⁶ SC, 107.

³⁷ GNLYC, 17-31.

words, time (considered above), music, space, art, objects and furnishings and movement are essential to liturgy. They are part of its fabric, interwoven, interconnected. The aesthetics of liturgy, and the Easter Vigil in particular, could be the topic of a paper on its own. Here it must suffice to say but a few words to indicate the breadth of such a discussion. A little more attention to physical space and an ecofeminist critique of it is appropriate.

Music contributes in a very real way to liturgy; it is more than a frill. "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value ... as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy."³⁸ The dimensions of music are at once transcendent, incarnational and eschatological.³⁹ Music as well as the arts, artists, space, furnishings and objects serve or are directed towards the honour and glory of God. They reflect and serve the dignity of worship.⁴⁰

Space and liturgy

The space in which we do liturgy shapes our understanding of God and of ourselves as an ecclesial community; it shapes who we become and how we live. The liturgical environment, broadly understood, must serve the liturgical action of the assembly in communion with each other, creation and God. The document "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship" addresses the requirements of worship.⁴¹ It speaks of the values of hospitality, mystery, functioning symbols, personal and communal experience, quality and appropriateness of actions and objects, and overall integrity. The Canadian bishops'

³⁸ SC, 112.

³⁹ "Musicam Sacram," in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1975), #5.

⁴⁰ SC, 122, 124, 127.

⁴¹ "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship," in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), pp. 313-340.

document *Our Place of Worship*⁴² adds these values: space accessible and usable by the differently-abled, stewardship of resources, environmental consciousness and justice (understood as right relationships). Liturgy is symbolic communication; no less does space shape and foster symbolic meaning. What kind of meaning do we want? What kind of world does a particular liturgical space open up? Do our spaces speak of life for all, but especially for women and the earth?

Long, rectangular spaces with a "sanctuary" space at one end predominate worship spaces and relationship with God is imagined on this vertical plane. Lesley Northup comments on such verticality.

If verticality is the evident mood of liturgical building and interior space, it is perhaps even more apparent in ritual movement and symbolization. Typically, long processions of ritual participants walk along the center aisle, symbolically moving not only forward but also upward. Immersion baptism sinks initiates below ground level to raise them up again. Worshipers "enter the church by mounting steps, themselves a symbol of the spiritual ascent on which [they] are embarking." The celebrant's invocations of God are accompanied by a panoply of gestures that unmistakably imply that God is "up."⁴³

The continued influence of hierarchical structures in culture and church support vertical symbolism. The layering of hierarchy and dualisms results in the alienation and diminishment of women in vertical spaces. Northup and others⁴⁴ have explored the nature of women's rituals and ways of worship. She points out some general features: the circle, shared leadership, connection to the ordinary and everyday experiences of women's lives,

⁴² Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Our Place of Worship* (Ottawa: Concacan, 1999), pp. 19-21.

⁴³ Lesley A. Northup, "Claiming Horizontal Space: Women's Religious Rituals," in *Studia Liturgica*, 25 (1995), p. 86.

⁴⁴ See for example Marjorie Procter-Smith and Janet R. Walton, eds., *Women at Worship: Interpretations of North American Diversity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993); Miriam Martin, "Woman and Worship: The Conversation Continues," in *Eglise et Théologie*, 28 (1997), pp. 301-317; Lesley A. Northup, *Ritualizing Women* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1997); Teresa Berger, *Women's Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

relationship with nature/earth, embodiment – participation through all the senses, towards a cooperation with secular culture.⁴⁵ Admittedly circles admit other biases. The circle is grounding and inclusive; all action takes place within a whole. In this way it avoids the dualisms associated with up/down, in/out, sacred/profane but the circle can also be perceived as inward looking. Shared leadership (in my own experience) works well in small groupings, but in larger settings (as in many parishes for example) may lack the focus that a single presider can bring.⁴⁶

The Easter Vigil as celebrated in the rectangular and vertical spaces mentioned above, stress height, separation, patriarchy and transcendence, elements of a hierarchical paradigm. In such a space there is often no space for the people to gather round the fire or perhaps even hear the opening greeting where we are instructed about what it is we do “on this most holy night,” namely share in the paschal mystery so as to live forever with Christ in God. In such a space, in what way are we present to and involved in this feast? And if we only face the presiding priest and ministers, all or most of them male, what expression is given to who God is and how God acts? Here we might understand and experience God at some distance, and ourselves in a detached way as sometimes aware and involved observers. It is a hierarchical space that clearly defines leaders of worship as separate from the assembly. We may be filled with a sense of the transcendence and glorious mystery of God, if as many of us are, we are attuned to seeking and finding God “in the heavens.” This might be strengthened by the choice of musical settings and the use of incense.

⁴⁵ Northup, “Claiming Horizontal Space,” pp. 92-98.

⁴⁶ Dialogue with female presiders in other Christian traditions would add another perspective to a discussion of the experience of vertical leadership.

What happens if the community gathers in a kind of semi-circle, first around the fire and then in the body of the church space? The experience might be of God in our midst and the assembly as gathered for this “work of praise.” The awareness people would have of each other in this kind of space/setting may provide a greater sense of being grounded or rooted in the here and now. Transcendence and immanence are both important; in most of our spaces it can be difficult to experience both. Yet Scott O’Brien⁴⁷ suggests that our liturgical spaces must do just that, and more. They are to be incarnational, eschatological, universal and sacramental. They are to be inculturated for a local people but with the capacity to embrace all peoples and cultures in some way. They are to point to and reflect the qualities of the Reign of God and communicate something about our life and identity in Christ. He writes:

It is my contention that liturgical architecture, as a well conceived and constructed spatial metaphor, allows the Christian community to contemplate how it is situated in the cosmos as a people called into the eschatological household of God.⁴⁸

Note the expansive quality of his statement. It points forward, is grounded in the assembly as the household of God, and is inclusive of all creation, indeed the cosmos. Such a space would reflect these signs of God’s reign: accessibility, inclusion and relationality. No less are these the values called for in an ecological way of being.

The font (to be considered below), altar, ambo, chair, furnishings, objects and vestments are also important. The altar, ambo and chair, while they may be moveable, ought also to be solid and dignified, and usually rest in one place. They might reflect the

⁴⁷ Scott O’Brien, “Liturgical Space as Place of Ecclesial Conversion” in *Liturgical Ministry*, 11 (Spring 2002), pp. 81-88.

⁴⁸ O’Brien, “Liturgical Space as Place of Ecclesial Conversion,” p. 85.

materials and talents of the place and people whose worship they serve. An ecofeminist consciousness alerts us that furnishings, objects and vestments that are mass-produced by cheap labour do not adequately give praise and glory to God. Nor do they reflect just relationships among people and with all creation. Worship demands both inner and outer integrity.

Summary

This chapter has thus far explored experience of time, the cosmic dimensions of night, Sunday, full moon and spring equinox, all at the heart of the Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil, with its roots in the Jewish Passover and pagan spring festivals, was a single celebration of the paschal mystery that grew more complex in the first three centuries and then admitted both decline and restoration. Today the Easter Vigil is placed within a Lent-Easter-Pentecost cycle and is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. Aesthetics (music, space, object, furnishings, art) are also found to be part of the fabric of a celebration of the Easter Vigil. With experience of time and cosmic proportions, they are the context for how a celebration of the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation.

When paid attention to the cosmic dimensions of the Easter Vigil are helpful. Night, full moon, spring equinox and Sunday draw our attention to cosmic, cyclical and *kairos* time, providing the potential for ecological living. By themselves, however, they are unable to address the anthropocentric and androcentric focus that will become clearer in part two. Here the androcentric focus can be found in attempts, however well meaning, to set a fixed day for Easter; it favours the synchronicity of human religious traditions and cultures over our connectedness with the universe. The development and subsequent

decline of the Vigil also shows an anthropocentric focus and a whole set of dualisms. The latter is evident in the lack of attention to space, movement and symbols. Clearly the artificial is valued over the natural, mind over matter, male over female, text over experience. Ecofeminist analysis speaks out against anthropocentrism, patriarchy and dualism wherever found.

What follows is an application of Kavanagh's method of liturgical theology – *theologia prima and theologia secunda* – in each of the four movements of the Easter Vigil. Anne Primavesi's critique of ecological and hierarchical paradigms provides a lens for experiencing and critically reflecting on this paschal mystery as it shapes a theology of creation. While Kavanagh speaks of *theologia secunda* as a more academic endeavour, the two activities of liturgical theology are not always readily separable. And so they will be interwoven in what follows.

Chapter Three

PART TWO: THE EASTER VIGIL

Having considered in part one of this chapter the cosmic and temporal dimensions of the Easter Vigil, its development as a Feast, and aesthetic language, it is time to turn attention toward celebration itself of the Easter Vigil. This liturgy is steeped in the language of symbol and metaphor so this chapter begins with an exploration of these, to highlight them in a way that supports Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology. Paul Ricoeur's understanding of how symbol and metaphor function, while presented in philosophical language, adds to the dialogue. A short overview of the Vigil in its parts precedes an in-depth exploration and critical ecofeminist analysis of each part: Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist.

Language of Symbol and Metaphor

Symbolic, metaphoric and ritual language is a particular kind of discourse with its own logic and manner of functioning. As a form of discourse it is a means of communication and meaning making that is dynamic and transformative. Discourse is an "event of language." We live at the level of symbol, metaphor and ritual when we celebrate liturgy. Symbol, metaphor and ritual are an everyday part of our verbal, non-verbal and written communication. The challenge for those who celebrate liturgy is to overcome a worldview and approach that emphasises scientific (empirical) and "objective" reason that impede our engagement of symbol and metaphor in ritual. An appreciation of the

functioning of symbolic language and metaphor can help us engage the symbol and metaphor of ritual in the Easter Vigil and be changed in the encounter.

The concept of symbol

Symbols belong to the language of sign, having a meaning or reference beyond them. Unlike signs, they are "weighted language," polyvalent; beyond their literal signification lies a figurative or suggestive dimension. Symbols become more complex as they assimilate new or further meanings. Symbolic language is rooted in human experience, in the person's orientation in space and time; symbols are thus of cosmic proportion; they speak of something concrete.¹

Symbols function in three spheres: the cosmic/religious, oneiric and poetic. Cosmic symbols read the sacred *on* the visible world. Mythological symbols (those pertaining to explanations of the beginning and end of time) express the power of this sphere to shape human living and ritual. Myth organizes symbols in narrative, clothing them in "fabulous personages, places, time, and episodes."² The accounts of creation in Genesis are an example of the language of myth in the Christian tradition. The oneiric functioning of symbols points to the appurtenance of symbols to the dream world, memory, the world of the human psyche. The poetic function of symbol is the world of imagination, or creativity, where symbol moves to its expression on the semantic level. But here symbol functions as "word-event" rather than portrait. The symbol is a dynamic reality that invites engagement and participation; it is more than an object. Symbolic language is effective language; participation in it is the occasion of change. Drawing on the whole of what it means to be a

¹ For the criteria and function of symbols see Paul Ricoeur, "Introduction: Phenomenology of Confession," in *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 10-18.

² Ricoeur, "Introduction: Phenomenology of Confession," p. 18.

person, the human being participates in existence not as a spectator, but as an actor (or subject).³

While in symbols there is a backwards movement (the role of memory, the associations we bring), there is also a more important forward movement. Symbols have an ontological dimension, that is, they are about being: "seeing [the world] as" and participating in that world.

Symbols are revelatory. Ricoeur writes: "I am convinced that we must think *not behind* the symbols, but starting from symbols, *according* to symbols, that their substance is indestructible, that they constitute the *revealing* substrate of speech which lives among men. In short the symbol *gives rise* to thought."⁴ Symbolic language is mediated by reflection and speculation. It functions at the conceptual level. The movement between the pre-conceptual (*bios* / life) and conceptual (*logos* /form) is the difference between "living in" symbols and "thinking from" symbols. It is in the natural impulse towards expression and communication that symbols find their way into *logos*, that they take on linguistic/conceptual form. In symbol the pre-conceptual and the conceptual come together. There is perhaps always a certain tension here, a give and take that doesn't allow the symbol to be pinned down and lose its capacity for meaning making.

The concept of metaphor

In the classical rhetoric of Plato and Aristotle it was thought that metaphors operated on the level of resemblance, of likeness. But philosopher Paul Ricoeur has shown that metaphors also function through surprise, through dissimilarity and tension.⁵ For

³ See Eric Voegelin, "The Symbolization of Order," in *Order and History*, vol. 1: *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), pp. 1-11.

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 299.

⁵ See Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and Symbol," in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, trans. David Pellauer (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 47-49.

Ricoeur metaphor is a production of the imagination; it is built on the attribution of properties that have not yet found literal expression in language. Metaphor is an innovative work in the realm of logos. Built on the polysemy of words (their capacity to carry and accumulate multiple meanings), metaphor is an innovative work in the realm of logos. Metaphors are about interpretation. By the experience of pertinence and impertinence tension is created and a new reality emerges. Metaphors make an "is and is not" type of assertion about their reference. Far from offering definitions, the metaphor offers ways of relating to that which is signified.⁶ Some appropriateness is demanded in the metaphor, but equally and more important is the shock that is created in the collision of interpretations. It is through the multiple interpretations of the terms that the metaphor is a production of the imagination and carries a "surplus of meaning," always suggesting something more. Like symbol, metaphor is a question of ontology.

Shape of the Easter Vigil

Time, cosmos, history, music and space, furnishings and objects, symbol and metaphor, word and ritual are interwoven becoming the fabric of the Easter Vigil. The whole fabric is woven together with four living strands: Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist. These are the essential elements of the Easter Vigil.

The assembly of believers begins its night of vigil with the Service of Light. Like the Israelites before us (Ex. 12:42) and like the slaves, lamps ready, awaiting the return of their master (Lk. 12:35-48), we are invited to gather in vigil and prayer, ready to "share [Christ's] victory over death and live with him for ever in God." Outdoors, in complete darkness and with the community gathered round, a new fire is lit and blest; the Easter candle is lighted from this new fire. In procession, their own candles lit from the Easter

⁶ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 33-34.

candle, the people and ministers, led by the Easter candle lifted high, enter the dark church, singing intermittently "Christ our light. Thanks be to God." The Easter candle is placed near the ambo where it remains for the Easter season. The deacon or other person sings the Easter Proclamation – the Exsultet – an invitation to praise and a hymn of thanksgiving that proclaims the significance of this night.

Once seated all listen attentively to the story of God's actions throughout the course of history. The longer than usual Liturgy of the Word consists of scripture readings, psalms, moments of silence, and prayers. This is truly a time of vigil, watching and waiting for the dawn that symbolises the risen Christ. The first seven readings tell a story of creation, sacrifice and a chosen people, a story of deliverance and the coming of the messiah – a saving God who in an everlasting covenant offers compassion, wisdom and a new heart. The psalms and prayers echo in some manner the reading each follows. The *Gloria* is sung, often accompanied by ringing bells, and marks a transition between Testaments. The epistle (Rom. 6:3-11) proclaims that we have been baptized into Christ's death so as to share in his resurrection. The gospel (from Matthew, Mark or Luke according to the year) is the story of the women at the empty tomb, receiving the news "Christ is risen." The homily brings to a close the Liturgy of the Word.

The Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation was restored to the Easter Vigil in 1951. Here we have an invitation to pray, the Litany of the Saints and Baptism. The Blessing of Water picks up the themes of creation and deliverance, recalls Jesus' own baptism and death, and calls on the Spirit to "unseal the living springs of baptism" that all "who are buried with Christ by baptism into death may rise with him to undying life;" it concludes with Jesus' command to teach and baptize the nations. During the prayer the Easter candle is lowered into the water in a symbolic gesture. If there are to be such, it is strongly recommended that baptism, confirmation, and reception to full communion be

celebrated at the Easter Vigil. This "mother of all vigils" that commemorates Christ's death and resurrection is a privileged time for initiation into this same mystery. This is also the night when all the faithful renew their own baptism and are sprinkled with water. The General Intercessions follow.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist takes place in the usual way. This feast during which "the [whole] universe resounds with Easter joy" inaugurates a new heavens and a new earth. The newly baptized, if any, are welcomed at the Table where all are fed and nourished by eating the bread of life and drinking from the cup of salvation. This is the centre of the Christian life, our hope and promise. After a solemn blessing the assembly is dismissed to the singing of Alleluia.

Darkness, silence, fire, light, candles, moon and sun, the voice that brings creation to being, water, generativity, bread and wine, time, ritual actions of lighting, speaking, cleansing, dying and rising, eating. These symbols and actions of earth and cosmos easily engage the believing community gathered to celebrate the Easter Vigil. What is going on as we participate in them? What are the relationships between them? Do they function as objects or subjects in action? Do they reflect ecological or hierarchical ways of being? It is important in unpacking these symbols to remember that for Kavanagh the theological moment comprises encounter, change and adaptation. We bring to the celebration ourselves, as whole persons and in our social, historical, economic and political contexts. We bring to the celebration our memories of previous vigils, other experiences of darkness, silence, fire, light, water, food and time. We encounter God in the midst of the world, the cosmos. A particular way of being is offered; we are invited to participate in that world, to be transformed by the liturgical action so that we in turn will continue to create that world beyond the liturgical action.

In the following study of Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist the present Roman Missal (Sacramentary) for use in Canada will be the reference.⁷ Comparison with earlier and later editions will highlight the dynamic of ecological and hierarchical paradigms at work in the Easter Vigil. It is important to note that the “later” revision refers to the 1998 proposed revision of the Canadian Sacramentary.⁸ Rome has rejected this revision in full. Perhaps efforts will be made to salvage parts of it in another form.

Service of Light

We step into darkness and silence to begin a night of vigil, and so are immersed in creation. Out of this darkness leaps flames of fire to light the darkness and our Easter candle. A voice speaks in the night; we give thanks in a glorious proclamation of praise for the light; we keep vigil – watching, waiting and listening. Our whole bodies are merged with the cosmos. What is going on in this interplay of darkness and the fire of light, of silence and speech? What sort of creation is shaped and suggested this night?

In the darkness outside the church the assembly hears the opening greeting:

Dear friends in Christ,
on this most holy night
when our Lord Jesus Christ passed from death to life,
the Church invites its sons and daughters throughout the world
to come together in vigil and prayer.
This is the passover of the Lord:
if we keep the memory of his death and resurrection
by hearing his word and celebrating his mysteries,
then we may be confident
that we shall share his victory over death
and live with him for ever in God.

⁷ Textual references to the Easter Vigil, unless otherwise stated, can be found in “Easter Vigil During the Night,” *Sacramentary*, Canadian Edition (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1974, 1983), #103.

⁸ See “The Resurrection of the Lord: The Easter Vigil” in *The Roman Missal: The Sunday Sacramentary*, Revised edition (Ottawa: The National Liturgy Office, 1998).

The church gathers in prayer for a night vigil to share in Christ's passage from death to life. This passage is set to begin in darkness, fire, light and time. Christ's passage from death to life is celebrated in cosmic proportions! The Vigil begins at or after nightfall and ends before daybreak. We cannot intimately know and engage in our whole person the darkness and light if we gather (as some do) early in the evening. This is not to be an exercise in mental gymnastics or make believe but rather an experience that engages us at the depths of ourselves. Celebration of the Easter Vigil is challenging and demanding. So why take shortcuts (like starting before dark), robbing the Vigil of its symbolic capacity? The mystery of the Incarnation, and the characteristics of an ecological paradigm, remind us to take seriously that body and mind make a whole and we come in that wholeness to celebrate the Easter Vigil.

It is in our immersion in the darkness itself, not in the thought of it, that we become attuned to silence, sound, shapes and shadows. The darkness can be a place of chaos; we might remember and will soon hear of the formless void, the darkness that once covered the deep. What memories of chaos, of darkness, silence and emptiness might one bring to the Vigil: the darkness and chaos known in the midst of a storm; the fright of a child, or a hiker, lost in the dark of the night or the forest; the darkness and emptiness, the loss of orientation that follows the death of a spouse, a child, or a loved one; the upheaval and destruction of war; the stillness, comforting or questioning, of darkness and silence; or the chosen darkness that seems to hold us comfortably and safely, wrapping us round? We have become unaccustomed to natural darkness; we can manufacture light at the flick of a switch. As the vigil starts can we stop and stand a moment in the darkness and silence? Gradually one might become aware that the darkness is not really dark for we gather after the equinox and after the full moon. These times in the cycle of nature occur when night and day are equal, when the light of the moon in the night is at its fullest. The darkness is

not some scary place where all orientation is lost, but rather a time of cosmic breadth and contrasts. It is in the night that God acts. In the Exsultet we will soon proclaim, "this is the night when."

Blessing of Fire and Lighting of the Candle

Do we know the feelings of anticipation that envelop us as we stretch and move to see the action at the centre of our gathering? We know more or less what will happen; our waiting is purposeful. A new fire is lit, a fire big enough to be seen and heard. The fire is symbolically important, not to be diminished by using a single piece of charcoal and disposable butane lighter! The extinction and rekindling of fire marked the New Year and new creation in ancient times. It celebrated the repetition and renewal of the cosmogony.⁹ Creation is in a continual process of renewal and rebirth. But what are the immediate images and associations of fire?

Fire is precious; it may burn steadily but also flicker and fade – a small flame might be extinguished with a breath of air. Fire is difficult to light from nothing, and in some cultures was guarded and tended so that it would not go out.¹⁰ A leaping, roaring fire may cause us to step back and be reminded of the power of fire for destruction, speedily taking into itself and feeding off all that lies in its path. Some fires, like forest fires, start quite naturally and on their own, the result of a complex of factors coming together in the cosmos. Such fires spawn regeneration of the land; something new grows over time. Other (forest) fires or arson are ignited by human intervention, be they purposeful actions and/or carelessness. The terrible fires that rage in Alberta and British Columbia show the ambiguity of fire. Thankfully creation has within itself the capacity for renewal and rebirth.

⁹ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁰ Gaelic people had a process called *Grieshog*, "the process of burying warm coals in ashes at night in order to preserve the fire for the cold morning to come. ... The old fire did not die; it kept its heat in order to be prepared to light the new one." Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life* (Wiltshire, England: Cromwell Press, 1995), pp. 36-37.

But for persons bringing to the vigil memories of loss of property, or of fires started by malicious intent, it is less easy to find hope and meaning in such destruction. Mitchell describes the lighting of the Easter fire as “an act of ritual arson,” of torching this world to create something new.¹¹ Pondering this Easter fire do we call to mind the injustices in our world (e.g. against women, children, people of colour and/or different ability, the poor, the refugee, the rape of earth and hoarding of its gifts) that need torching? What is it in our systems, cultures and hearts that need such ritual burning to know its inherent regenerative capacity?

Fire will always change people and change all of creation in one way or another. Fire is necessary but dangerous. A fire in the midst of the plain or on a trail may keep predators at bay and give warmth to travellers and nomads. Fires, like campfires, are lit more for social reasons as clans, families or friends gather round to sing, tell stories or cook. Here humanity controls fire for its good purposes. Around the fire people are fed and nourished at every level of their being; they are bonded as a people.

The Easter Vigil’s ritual fire will “in flame us with new hope” and bring us “to the feast of eternal light.” It is the fire that is light in the darkness; it is the fire from which we light our Easter candle, symbol of Christ, to whom belongs all time. “Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to him and all the ages. To him be glory and power through every age for ever.” The fire must be big enough that we can see and hear this statement as the candle is lit: “May the light of Christ, rising in glory, dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.” Here the focus of the fire, of the light of Christ, is toward humanity. But in an optional processional formulary the deacon sings “Christ our light, the light of the world.” We respond saying: “let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” This proclamation invites us to think of world, world perhaps

¹¹ Mitchell, “Re-creating the World,” p. 4.

encompassing nations, earth and cosmos. This formulary might help mitigate in some small way an anthropocentric focus.

The light from the Easter Candle is shared with all in the assembly as they light their tapers, passing the flame from one to another, filling the space with light. There should be sufficient tapers for the whole assembly. These tapers, the Easter Candle and likewise altar candles, must be beeswax candles. The flame will burn brightly and colourfully. Light and dark are held in tension; light and shadows dance in the night illuminating the darkness; the flame emits a warm glow. Paraffin wax with its potentially toxic properties, and even worse butane candles, are no substitute for beeswax with its sweet fragrance. Beeswax's negative ions purify the air and promote balance by binding with positive ions (a natural air purifier).¹² Do we settle for neat and tidy for fear of getting messy or risking wax falling down the sides of a candle? Preference for safeguarding a sanitized worship space permits of no reminders of the evening's activities. Clearly, from an ecofeminist perspective, beeswax candles are necessary. Beeswax candles are natural products and most clearly reflect our rootedness in and continuity with earth and all living things. Paraffin and butane candles signify and shape a world of artificiality. If we do not live in this liturgy as participants in the whole of creation, reverencing and rejoicing in the gifts of creation (bees, pollen, flowers) and what is made of creation, how then are we to shape a world that lives in this way?

Rubrics in the Sacramentary call for the lights in the church to be turned on at this point. The assembly stands and holds lighted candles throughout the singing of the Easter Proclamation.¹³

¹² A trip to a beeswax candle vendor at a craft show will enlighten anyone on the benefits, uses and kinds of beeswax candles.

¹³ My own experience of the Easter Proclamation has always been in a church lit only by the Easter Candle and tapers of those present; perhaps with an additional light for the cantor. Partial lighting has been provided during the Liturgy of the Word, with most lights being turned on and other candles lit at the Gloria.

Easter Proclamation

Hearing "Christ our light, the light of the world" easily moves us into the cosmic scope of the Exsultet, our Easter proclamation and thanksgiving for the light. The invitation is extended to all of creation to exult and rejoice in Jesus Christ who is risen now, Christ whose glory fills the universe. The joyful voices of cosmos (all you pow'rs in heaven and on earth), angels, earth and humanity (mother Church with all her children) resound in the night so as to "shake these walls with shouts of praise." All of creation stands in the light of Christ. Yet this Exsultet could be improved upon. In the 1998 revised edition of the Sacramentary, an alternative translation of the Exsultet is given.¹⁴ There the cosmic symbolism is more expansive and explicit, broadening the scope of creation, more clearly including non-human creation. All the elements and themes of Easter's date come together: blazing suns, a night of rebirth, full mother moon that marks the months and gives light. From them comes the day and life; they are metaphor for Christ who enlightens and gives life. There too is humanity, children born of clay and water, seen as part of earth.

This same alternate proclamation continues praising God for the gift of light, of fire from which comes creation in all its expansive glory and variety.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Exult and sing, O Shining angel choirs.
Exult and dance, bright stars and blazing suns.
The first-born of creation, Jesus Christ,
is ris'n in radiant splendour from the dead.
Rejoice, O awesome night of our rebirth.
Rejoice, O mother moon, that marks the months.
For from your fullness comes, at last, the Day
when sin is robbed of pow'r and death is slain.
Awaken, earth! Awaken, air and fire.
O children born of clay and water, come.
The One who made you rises like the sun
to scatter night and wipe your tears away.
Arise then, sleepers, Christ enlightens you.
Arise from doubt and sadness, sin and death.
With joyful hearts and spirits set afire,
draw near to sing this Easter candle's praise."

¹⁵ "We praise you, God, for all your works of light.
We bless you for that burst of fire and flame

This hymn reflects what we know scientifically of the origins of creation; science and faith come together for these are God's works of light. The light is then focused in Christ. Sadly, because the 1998 revision was never accepted, this alternative translation to the Exsultet may not be known and available for use.

The remainder of the Easter proclamation, while more explicitly theological, is yet steeped in the stuff of cosmos. "This is the night" is repeated five times; the time is clearly now! This is the night of the Passover feast, the night of Israel's deliverance; the night when the darkness of sin is destroyed; the night where Christians are washed clean and restored to a life of grace, the night when death and darkness are no more and Christ rose from the grave; the night which shines as clear as the day (cf. Ps. 139:12). This is a night of seven-fold blessing:

How holy is this night, which heals our wounds and washes all evil away.
A night to restore lost innocence and bring mourners joy.
A night to cast out hatred. A night for seeking peace and humbling pride.
O truly blessed night when heaven is wedded to earth
and we are reconciled with God.

The Passover feast is recalled where the Lamb is slain, its blood consecrating the homes of all believers; we remember Israel's passage through the sea led by a pillar of fire that both

through which you first created all that is:
a living universe of soaring stars,
of space and spinning planets, surging seas,
that cradle earth and rock against her breast.
We praise you for light's beauty, motion, speed:
for southern light, a brilliant cross on high;
for northern light that glows and dances bright;
for eastern light that paints the morning sky;
for western light that slants upon our doors,
inviting us to praise you ev'ry night.
We bless you for the light invisible:
the fire of faith, the Spirit's grace and truth,
the light that bonds the atom, stirs the heart,
and shines for ever on the face of Christ."

guided and destroyed. Christ is the Morning Star (Rev. 22:16), the one who conquers and has authority over the nations (2:26,28), and who will dwell in us (2 Peter 1:19).

Evidence of a hierarchical paradigm

Ecofeminism brings to light how unacceptable is a hierarchical paradigm and its devastating consequences for earth and people, especially women. A closer examination of the Service of Light reveals a predominantly hierarchical paradigm at work – one that is gender biased and dualist. Language for God is lofty and patriarchal: unseen God, almighty Father, O God, Father most holy, eternal Father. These images are not much different in the 1998 revision that simply reduces the references to God as “Father” favouring “God” instead. The references to Christ are cosmic (Alpha, Omega, Light, Morning Star) yet patriarchal by association; Christ is most often “Lord.” References to humans are sometimes inclusive of both men and women, but other times refer only to men. The 1998 revision of the Sacramentary is careful to be inclusive, but exclusively male historical figures are retained. The list of subjects is broad: God (God, Jesus Christ, Spirit and Holy Spirit), humanity and sometimes men alone, the night and fire.

“Mother Church” and God’s people rejoice, but it is men who are the recipients of salvation.¹⁶ Is she rejoicing for her sons, then? What of her daughters and all creation? The earth bears in its body the effects of humanity’s sin but the message of salvation and redemption is anthropocentric. And is the image of “Mother Church” a positive one for women? Ann Patrick Ware suggests it is not.

But there is cold comfort here, since there are too many images crowding into our female psyches of the subordinate relationship of Church to Christ (woman to man; human to divine). Thus, the words “Holy Mother Church” end up

¹⁶ It is faulty to retort, then, that only men sin and so need salvation. Scripture and Christian tradition are full of examples where women alone are treated as sinners. Exclusive language for humanity offers no justice to women or men.

marginalizing women, because the term in fact is a patriarchal construct that systematically oppresses women.¹⁷

The presiding ministers of the assembly are male: the priest and the deacon. Women are excluded as ritual presiders. While statements from Rome praise women, women are usually esteemed as child-bearers and nurturers, or virgins. While giving birth is important, it is hardly the sum total of women's giftedness.

The Exsultet is replete with hierarchical dualisms and the language of domination and displacement. God's glory, the Son Jesus Christ, the brightness of the King, metaphors of light as grace, holiness, glory, radiance, splendour, joy, salvation, love, innocence, peace and Morning Star, are set in opposition to the darkness of hearts and minds, of sin, slavery and defilement, of death, hatred and earthly pride, of the night. Dualisms have not worked well for women. Women have traditionally been aligned with the less important, the less valued in the pairing. It might seem in the Exsultet that dualisms are overcome: the darkness is not dark but shines as day, heaven and earth are wedded. But "man" is reconciled to God and Christ shed his peaceful light on all "mankind." It is the "fathers" of Israel who were saved. The language for salvation is violent: Christ has conquered (the earth and darkness it seems); Christ has ransomed us with his blood; Christ, the true Lamb is slain; the pillar destroyed the darkness of sin; Christ broke the chains of death. Coupled with male triumphal images and other images lacking, the metaphors reflect their "is-ness" more than dissimilarity. In a world where violence is seen as the first solution to conflict between individuals and among nations, where women are often the victims of violence, the Exsultet supports patterns of violence. If we are to live ecofeminist values we must call for new language, and new hearts and minds. If liturgy, as Kavanagh says, reflects

¹⁷ Ann Patrick Ware, "The Easter Vigil: A Theological and Liturgical Critique," in *Women at Worship: Interpretations of North American Diversity*, ed. Marjorie Procter-Smith and Janet R. Walton (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster / J. Knox Press, 1993), p. 88.

“Church doing World,” this is not the kind of world that can be supported by ecofeminists, nor is it rooted in Gospel values.

Liturgy of the Word

To fully explore the scripture, psalm and prayer texts of the Liturgy of the Word would be a most ambitious and complex task. And others have done this work, among them biblical scholars and feminist theologians in various disciplines. Nor does exegesis of biblical texts belong to this thesis. But the Word is nonetheless important here; it is a significant element of the Easter Vigil; it is the Word proclaimed; they are words we listen to and hear on both conscious and subconscious levels. So we consider the space in which they are proclaimed, their overall tone and an ecofeminist critique.

The Space for proclamation

The cosmic proportions of creation continue in the Liturgy of the Word. From the centrality of creation and its beginnings in the Genesis story, through the Red Sea, and in the earth metaphors that offer a way into God’s activity, the story of salvation is proclaimed. How do the symbols of creation function here, how does ritual shape a theology of creation, what is happening as we participate in the process of encounter, change and adaptation? What memories of these stories and the work of the paschal mystery in us, do we bring to the encounter?

The Service of Light completed, the assembly is invited into a time of storytelling, of remembering.

Dear friends in Christ,
 we have begun our solemn vigil.
 Let us now listen attentively to the Scriptures.
 They tell how God saved a chosen people in the course of history
 and, in the fullness of time,
 sent his only-begotten Son as our Redeemer.
 Let us pray that our God will bring to completion

the saving work of the paschal mystery.

This is a time of listening. We are invited to set aside the haste of chronological time to enter into the time of *kairos*, of heightened and new meaning to familiar stories. The initial excitement of seeing a fire lit, the Paschal Candle carried in for all to see, tapers lit, the solemn proclamation of the Exsultet over, a hush comes over the assembly. The church (or other space) is often in semi-darkness, with just enough light for readers to proclaim the Word and the assembly to sing the psalm responses. The people's candles extinguished and the most prominent light being the Easter candle, the space of creation opened up may make us open and receptive, quiet even. After the intensity of the Service of Light this space is more meditative and reflective giving us a chance to catch our breath and deepen the mystery. Accustomed as we are to noise, activity and speed, during this time of meditation and reflective silence we must remain watchful and attentive.

As previously mentioned rubrics call for the lights and candles in the church to be turned on just before singing the Exsultet. It is, however, a common experience in churches to experience the liturgy of the word in semi-darkness. Semi-darkness can be a comfortable milieu for storytelling, but it is not a bedtime story we hear; rather it is a story of salvation that will stir hearts and minds to conversion and which will challenge living.¹⁸ Another dynamic happens in the movement from the flood and brightness of Easter Candle and tapers held by each one in the assembly to a space of darkness once more. What is said of creation? Is all of creation and human history darkness until there is Christ? Further when altar candles are lit or church lights turned on after the First Testament readings a discontinuity is indicated between the two testaments, leaving the First Testament to the darkness and the Second Testament to the light. The singing of the *Gloria* emphasises such a rupture. Surely we do not want to send this kind of message to Jewish sisters and

¹⁸ Or perhaps for some it is heard as a bedtime story, candle light and uniform voices lulling us to sleep, unaware of how hearts, minds and living are shaped.

brothers. Rather we want to say there is something definitive about God's self-revelation and action in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The readings taken as a whole reflect a continuous movement and direction toward the paschal mystery of Christ.

The Tone of proclamation

This Liturgy of the Word is a time full of purpose. God's intentions for the world are proclaimed; world, cosmos, is in-the-making. Bondage is broken now; slavery is ended now; creation is made, renewed and sustained now. This is a time of *kairos*, a moment of opportunity that embraces past, present and future. This is a time for work to be done, the completion of the paschal mystery; this is a work for which we are to be attentive. The paschal mystery, like creation, is an activity. Marking the passage from death to life the paschal mystery is about dying and living; as such it is intimately involved in the activity of creation.

We tell the story; we remember our history; we proclaim God's action now. An ecofeminist lens makes us notice the decidedly anthropocentric focus. With the exception of Gen. 1:1 – 2:2, the readings focus on God's action among people, rather than in the whole of creation. Nine scripture readings tell how in the course of history God saved a chosen people and, in the fullness of time, sent his only-begotten Son as the Redeemer. The earth and its processes are metaphors for God's redemptive activity.

Yet light and water are common metaphors throughout the Liturgy of the Word. Light features in many of the sung responsorial psalms: the Lord is wrapped in light as with a garment (Ps. 104:2); the command of the Lord enlightens the eyes (Ps. 19:8); thirsting for God's light to lead and guide (Ps. 42:3). The accompanying prayers include these phrases: enlighten the people that we may perceive; wonders of ancient deeds shine forth / through the light of the new covenant; God of unwavering light ... may the whole world see and know; brighten this most holy night with the radiance of the risen Christ. The readings

speak of light. The Genesis 1 reading is full of light metaphors: lights of many kinds (stars, sun, moon, day, night) mark time and give light to the earth. Abraham and Isaac rise in the early morning and carry fire for the sacrifice; Abraham's offspring will be as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 22). A cloud and pillar of fire light up the night and offer protection as the Israelites leave Egypt (Ex. 14). Wisdom is light; Jacob is encouraged to "walk toward the shining of her light" (Bar. 3). The gospel readings all have a connection with the cosmos: in Matthew an earthquake and lightning accompany the angel's announcement of the resurrection (Mt. 28:2); the angel's appearance "was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow" (Mt. 28:3); the synoptic gospels indicate the time for resurrection as dawn or sunrise on the first day of the week (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1); John's gospel (proclaimed Easter Sunday during the day) speaks of the first day of the week but while it was still dark (Jn. 20:1).

"The face of the waters" (Gen. 1) is juxtaposed with an image of the earth as formless void and the face of the deep. The water is home to swarms of living creatures and likewise great sea monsters. "The waters stood above the mountains ... springs gush forth in the valleys and flow between the hills" (Ps. 104). The streams offer habitation and life for plants, animals and people. The walls of water of the Red Sea are protective and destructive (Ex. 14). Wisdom is like a fountain (Bar. 3). Water quenches thirst and makes the earth fruitful (Isa. 55). God will sprinkle clean, cleansing water on Israel (Ezek. 36); our soul thirsts for God like the deer that longs for running streams (Ps. 42).

The prayer texts echo rather than exegete the scripture texts by emphasising redemption and displacement, itself a subtle dualism: Christ, his life and teaching are seen over and against, or replacing salvation history that had gone before. They make no reference to how the readings might speak to today's context.

An ecofeminist critique

As powerful and stirring as word proclaimed, psalms sung, prayers offered are patriarchy and hierarchy yet mark them. Therefore, some further comment about the Liturgy of the Word is in order.

*First reading: Creation*¹⁹

The story of salvation history does begin with creation (Gen. 1:1 – 2:2). Contrary to creation *ex nihilo*, creation exists, be it a “formless void” or chaos or darkness covering the deep; out of the deeps God arranges heavens and earth. By God’s voice (Gen. 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,29), God’s command, light and darkness, waters, dry land, vegetation, lights, living creatures of all kinds (creatures of land, sea and air, animal and human) appear. God sees that all of it is good, in its parts (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25) and as a whole (Gen. 1:31). Such is the creative power of the divine word (cf. Ps. 33:6,9) that continues to create and sustain (Pss. 104:30; 107:19-20; 147:15-18) or even destroy (Ps. 29:3-9). God’s creative word is in the mouth of the prophet (Ex. 4:10-16; Jer. 1:9). God’s word, in Hebrew *dabar* (meaning to get behind and push), gives expression to thought. Thus, *dabar*, is both “word” and “event.” The creative capacity of words is evident from ancient times to the present day.²⁰ That we give a name to people and things, and what names we give to them are important. Names are expressions of a person. A name might be changed to indicate a new identity (e.g. family); God gave new names to those chosen for a special purpose (Cephas - Peter; Saul - Paul; Jacob - Israel); titles of Jesus in John’s gospel indicate character. Words are always efficacious; never empty they name, create, hurt or heal (cf. Isa. 55:11). Words are to be taken seriously; they stand for something. Words, once spoken, cannot be taken back. Feminist attention to language of liturgy and language of God reinforces this fact.

¹⁹ The titles for the readings are given in the Sacramentary.

²⁰ Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1964), pp. 30-31.

Creation has a voice too, a voice that tells of the glory of God and proclaims God's handiwork (cf. Ps. 19:1-6). But the voice of creation today can tell another story: a story of polluted water and air; a story of creatures now, or soon to be extinct; a story of human manipulation of water, soil and produce that effectively denudes the forests and rapes the earth of her capacity to be life-giving. Ecofeminism concerns itself with this present reality. The lack of acknowledgement of these crises and the absence of scriptural exegesis that responds to them is unsatisfactory. God has blessed all living creatures, not only humans (Gen. 1: 22, 28). In the encounter of liturgy these voices come together and need to be held in creative tension; we know both in our lives: the joy, wonder and refreshment of being in the midst of this creation that is bigger than ourselves, and the reality of a Walkerton crisis, or flooded lands or drought-ridden lands. How are we changed by a liturgy that uses water in joyous abandon and plenty? How are we changed by a liturgy that celebrates the breadth of God's creativity that exists in harmony and interdependence? Or do we even hear the whole story proclaimed? It is more than strange that a shorter anthropocentric option of the Genesis story is given, one that highlights creation of humanity to the exclusion of all else (Gen. 1:1, 26-31a).²¹ The language of human domination is central: have dominion over the fish of the sea, birds of the air (these two repeated twice, vss. 26, 28); cattle, wild animals, every creeping thing, the earth, every living thing, fruit of the earth.

The critical voice of ecofeminism calls for increased sensitivity to this language of domination and its power in the Christian tradition at the level of myth. Primavesi writes:

A particular reading of this foundational text [the opening chapters of Genesis] has given Western culture the fundamental idea that the universe is a hierarchy: a system of order imposed by spiritual power from above, an order to which we owe obedience.²²

²¹ The same option is provided in the 1998 Revised Sacramentary.

²² Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 203.

It is not power itself that bothers Primavesi; it is how power functions. She talks about ecological power as power-from-within rather than power-over.²³ Attempts are made to see in Gen. 1 a call to stewardship. While this can have less devastating consequences for nature and women, its worldview is yet anthropocentric and hierarchical. Primavesi reminds us that Jesus breaks down hierarchical structures.²⁴

Second reading: Abraham's Sacrifice

A story of sacrifice follows: Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18). Like the first reading from Genesis, this one ends on a note of God's blessing and promised fruitfulness, but echoes the metaphor of domination – "your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies" (vs. 17). Men and women experience sacrifice very differently.²⁵ Sacrifice is a deeply troubling reality for many women. A feminist telling of western history shows how women are disproportionately the ones to suffer violence towards them. While the root meaning of sacrifice is to make holy, this happens through violence; women are all too often the worthless, expendable objects of violence. This reading may stick in the throat of many women. How do hearers experience the letting of blood through a violent act (the taking of life) and the letting of blood in childbirth (the giving of life)? Or do they make these connections? The shorter version of this reading omits the journey and Isaac's questioning of his father, Abraham. In a hierarchical and patriarchal world questions are unwelcome and usually left unanswered.

Third reading: Passage through the Red Sea

The third reading, the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea, must always be proclaimed; others may be omitted.²⁶ Exodus 14:15-31; 15:20 sees the story of salvation

²³ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 58f., pp. 220-221.

²⁴ Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, p. 128ff. For a critique of the stewardship approach see McDougall, "Cosmos as Primary Sacrament," pp. 102-109; Eaton, "Ecological-Feminist Theology," p. 82.

²⁵ For a brief comment see Ware, "The Easter Vigil," p. 102; and Roll, "Risen to New Life: A Feminist Reading of the Easter Triduum," (University – GH Essen: LAUD, 1999), pp. 7-8.

²⁶ See rubrics for the Liturgy of the Word.

being worked out in creation: on land and in seas as well as among people. God acts in time; God acts in and through creation. As waters part to right and left allowing the children of Israel to pass through, and then collapse on the pursuing Egyptians, creation witnesses to and is the vehicle of God's saving activity. Through the sea is both deliverance of a people and wholesale destruction of another people; waters give life to the chosen ones and drown the enemy. The meaning is ambiguous.

Fourth reading: The New Jerusalem; Sixth reading: The Fountain of Wisdom; Seventh reading: A new heart and a new spirit

There are both troubling and beautiful metaphors related to women. The fourth reading from the prophet Isaiah (54:5-14) holds up an image of the forsaken wife, grieved in spirit and cast off in a man's youth. This metaphor of Israel as forsaken wife "is reminiscent of the thousands of older women whose philandering spouses have found younger, prettier partners."²⁷ She was abandoned as though this was her fault, and then taken back. The language of God's steadfast love and compassion is eloquent; note the jewels and precious stones of the earth and the language of promise – never again. But this promise is on the backs of women who too often don't experience fidelity. The sixth reading from Baruch (3:9-15, 32 – 4:4), one that is often omitted, focuses on wisdom, symbolized as female. Wisdom is a gift whose fruits are strength, understanding and a spirit of discernment. Israel is chided for forsaking this "fountain of wisdom" for walking in her ways is to live in peace. In the seventh reading the prophet Ezekiel (36:16-17a, 18-28) decries Israel's ways and deeds, for profaning and defiling the land and God's name. God deals harshly with Israel (vs. 19), yet gathers Israel back, cleansing and giving Israel a new heart. What is not heard is vs. 17b: "their conduct in my sight was like the

²⁷ Ware, "The Easter Vigil," p. 90.

uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period.” One might assume this choice was made in recognition of this verse’s offensive, time-bound yet enduring nature.²⁸

Fifth reading: Salvation freely offered to all

Isaiah 55:1-11 is delightful, rich with life-giving images of creation and covenant. Here covenant relationship with God is expressed in the metaphor of food and nourishment: water, wine, milk and rich food in abundance; rain and snow that water the earth making it bring forth and sprout. But reading this text through an ecofeminist lens one asks how such a reading moves us to respond to the realities of today: soup kitchens, starving people, hoarding of earth’s resources by and for a minority of its peoples. Do we hear that this is not the world being made by liturgy? Do we hear this reading exegeted as a challenge to create a different world?

The Epistle

The epistle, Romans 6:3-11, focuses on baptism as sharing in the paschal mystery. But here we have Paul’s dichotomy of the old “body of sin” destroyed so as to live with Christ. Death is seen in opposition to life (“death no longer has dominion”) rather than birth and death as a continuum of life, and through the paschal mystery, to eternal life in Christ.

The Gospel

The gospel is the one place where women are portrayed in a positive light: entrusted with the news of Jesus’ resurrection, and capable, in all their compassion, fear and desire of proclaiming to others this Good News. It is incongruent and intolerable that in the celebration of the Eucharist women are not to be heard proclaiming the Good News. The official Church position continues to bar women from this ministry. Perhaps it is the

²⁸ It is interesting to note that The New English Bible does not have this verse.

disciples' disbelief of the women that the Church has listened to and taken to heart rather than the words of the angel(s) (in the synoptics) and Jesus (in John).

Summary

While a full array of creation and cosmos is evident in the Liturgy of the Word, there are mixed messages concerning gender and creation; patriarchal and dualistic language are strong. How is it that the story of creation can be, and often is, so easily omitted? It was noted that scripture passages affirm wisdom as female and present the scorned abandoned woman. Most people are probably not aware of the allusion to a woman's menstruation as unclean. We don't see similar incongruities in the treatment of men. Language for God and references to human persons reflect a patriarchal world-view.

Unfortunately, to the sensitive ear the readings give the impression that [God's] fidelity and largesse extend only to men. One hears an endless repetition of "man," "mankind," "he," "his creation," "his Son," "his redemption," "Lord," "father," "him who sows," "him who eats," "Son of Man." References are to Moses, Abraham, Isaac – even the animal is male, a ram! – pharaoh, officers, army, Jacob his [God's] servant, Israel his [God's] son. Likewise in the responsorial hymns and in the Gloria, God is indubitably male: "the Lord is a warrior, Lord is his name"; "the Lord ... covered himself in glory"; "the God of my father, I extol him"; "Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father."²⁹

The prayers after the readings offer exclusively male, patriarchal forms of address: almighty and eternal, Lord God, God and Father, Father, almighty and ever-living.³⁰

Dualisms are not as evident as in the Service of Light. Genesis 1 separates light and dark, day and night, sun and moon, but there is no strong waiting of one over the other. The one

²⁹ Ware, "The Easter Vigil," p. 89. The Lectionary in use in Canada uses the NRSV translation of the Bible. Here language for people is significantly less male-centred than in other translations.

³⁰ The 1998 revision of the Sacramentary offers some other images: God of our ancestors or God of ages (after the third reading), God of life (after the sixth reading), God of power and unwavering light (after the seventh reading). Sadly we will not see these small but helpful changes. At the same time they do not go far enough. While reference to God as Father occurs only once, and the image of domination is less strong, female images of God are not offered.

exception already noted: its anthropocentric bias. Water is seen in all its complexity and many actions. The earth is fruitful; the land has been defiled. Humans are sinners receiving God's wrath, yet clearly beloved and favoured of God. Finally the gospels highlight women as the first recipients of the news of Jesus' resurrection. Clearly they are apostles; it is more than unfortunate that "official church teaching continues to declare women unfit for preaching or even for reading the Gospel at Mass."³¹

An ecofeminist critique demands significant reform to the Liturgy of the Word. We are people who bring our experience and ourselves to the hearing of the Word and are often not changed in life-giving ways. True, the language of scripture is filled with symbol and metaphor, but I suggest that some texts do not witness to an ecological paradigm to begin with and others have ceased to function in that way. Centuries of interpreting the text in hierarchical fashion, has robbed the text of its metaphoric capacity. The Liturgy of the Word does not open up a world of meaning and being that is at its heart ecological. It is to be a word of promise and good news, a word calling for conversion. This does not happen in ways that are life giving for women and the earth.

Liturgy of Baptism

The Liturgy of Baptism begins with an invitation to pray for those who approach the waters of rebirth. Singing of the Litany of the Saints carries forward the journey – physical and/or metaphoric – to the baptismal font. The litany is made up of an invocation of holy persons followed by a series of petitions to Jesus Christ. The litany may give a local expression to the community by including the titular of the church, any local patrons

³¹ Ware, "The Easter Vigil," p. 93.

or the patron saints of the Elect. The repetition of phrases "Lord have mercy," "pray for us," "Lord save your people," "Lord hear our prayer" is quite meditative and carries a sense of urgency and expectation. What follows is the blessing of baptismal water, baptism and confirmation, the assembly's renewal of baptismal promises, sprinkling with the blessed water, and general intercessions. Reading this liturgy through the lens of ecofeminism reveals a theology of creation that is androcentric and patriarchal. It also reveals the possibility of an experience that is in part ecological, that is wholistic, participative and relational.

Visible signs: ministers, water and font

The most visible and involved people are the priest-presider, other ministers (sometimes men, sometimes male and female youth) who will assist the action, those to be baptized and their godparents. The assembly and level of its participation varies with the location for baptism, the size of the assembly, and whether it is possible to have them gather near the font along with those to be baptized.

Central to the worship space and a celebration of the Easter Vigil is the baptismal font. In early Christian times baptisteries were common, providing for full immersion of the adult, a visible symbol of entrance and incorporation into the church, and privacy of those to be baptized. Today the presence and participation of the assembly is important while keeping living flowing water and preferably immersion. Liturgy, including baptism, is at once personal and communal. So baptismal fonts have moved into the central worship space. The baptismal font and its environment must speak of water, incorporation and paschal mystery. The space is to be large enough that people may see from a distance and that sufficient people can gather around it. The font is to be large enough to baptize an

infant, hopefully too an adult, by immersion; or it might provide floor space that allows for the pouring of water over an adult. Immersion is “more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.”³² The shape and design³³ of the font speak symbolically, ritually and theologically. They are space and container for water, a primary and cosmic symbol. Water cleanses, refreshes, moves, runs, creates and destroys, invigorates, heals, buries, transports. Do our fonts speak of these aspects, or are they small “bird baths” with just enough standing water for pouring a trickle over an infant’s forehead? Lavish use of water in baptism will speak of a loving generous God, of washing and of life. Even where water is scarce, worship – here baptism – is a significant ritual that demands we give our very best, and even from our poverty.

The Litany of Saints

The Liturgy of Baptism begins with an invitation to prayer and the Litany of Saints. The invitation is simple and to the point asking that our brothers and sisters approaching the waters of rebirth be supported with God’s mercy and love. God is here addressed as “our almighty Father,” a personal and transcendent title. In this way it holds well as a metaphor but is weak when the only personal form of address used in the Vigil is “Father,” reinforcing an experience of patriarchy. What would our experience of baptism be if the presider for the Easter Vigil was an ordained woman and the personal form of addressing God, Mother, was used? Might it not lend strength to the symbolism of birthing and regeneration?

³² Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987). General Introduction #22.

³³ Shapes can reflect baths, tombs (rectangles), death (six-sided / sixth day of the week / Jesus’ death), new life (eight-sided / eight day / new creation), womb and birth (circular), paschal mystery (cruciform). Most were sunken pools, with the possibility then of going down into the water and up and out.

The Litany of Saints points to a predominantly male mystical body praying for us as only seven of the 27 names are of women. These seven are Mary, Mother of God; Mary Magdalene from the gospels; Perpetua, Felicity and Agnes, early Christian martyrs; Catherine (of Sienna), who worked to return the papacy to Rome from Avignon, and Teresa (of the Child Jesus) who entered the austere life and prayer of Carmel.³⁴ One has to ask why so few women are held up as witnesses and intercessors, and among them no married women, only virgins?

In the litany we pray "Lord, save your people" by your coming as man, your death and rising, your gift of the Holy Spirit. It would be more appropriate and inclusive to pray "by your coming *in flesh*" for it is not Christ's maleness that is important here, but rather that God became incarnate – took on human flesh and entered human history. It is interesting to note that in the third typical edition of the Roman Missal, Latin text, the phrase is *Per incarnationem tuam*.³⁵ A translation of this is the union of divine and human in Jesus Christ.

Blessing of water

The blessing of baptismal water follows. At the font the priest-presider blesses the baptismal water with hands extended over the water. This prayer addressed to God the Father recalls in a spirit of thanksgiving the sacramental sign of water in its many dimensions: waters at the dawn of creation, waters of the flood, waters of the Red Sea, waters of the Jordan, water from the side of Jesus, water of the font. It includes Jesus'

³⁴ Thankfully some parishes use other settings of the litany which may include more women as well as saints of our day, resulting in a slightly more inclusive body of intercessors.

³⁵ In this instance the Latin text is more inclusive; in other places the Canadian Sacramentary is more inclusive. For example, where the Latin begins prayer texts with *fratres carissimi* the English text in question uses "dear friends in Christ." This is particularly noticeable in the Liturgy of the Word.

command to baptize, an exorcism, and finally an invocation of the Holy Spirit's action enlivening, anointing and gracing. The final sentence of the prayer asks that we share in the mystery of Christ's dying and rising. The Easter candle is inserted in the water, once or three times, during the epiclesis; on its removal from the water the people acclaim in song: "Springs of water, bless the Lord. Give him glory and praise for ever."

This blessing requires a careful and in-depth exploration. It is helpful to consider some aspects of an earlier text in an effort to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the present text. The present text comes to us from the Roman Missal of Paul VI. The revisions of Pius V were in use from 1570 to 1969 – the Council of Trent to the Second Vatican Council. It is this text that will serve for comparison.³⁶

The structure of the blessing is as follows: oration, anamnesis, exorcism and epiclesis. It will be shown that the present text uses displacement theology, is strongly Christocentric and paschal in character, androcentric and ambiguous in its sexual dimension. It will also be seen that sexual imagery is variously experienced and understood as inclusive or as dominating.

Oration and Anamnesis

The blessing of baptismal water begins with the male personal address, Father (the Latin text uses the more inclusive title *Deus*). An anamnesis of water is scriptural and built on themes of creation, the end of sin and evil, liberation and mission. The references point to God's purposeful action beginning with the waters of creation, then of liberation or freedom from sin. The flood destroys evil – sin; the Red Sea destroys the enemy leading

³⁶ "Holy Saturday: The Blessing of the Font," in *THE MISSAL in Latin and English* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1950).

Israel out of slavery, reinterpreted as slavery from sin. The waters of the Jordan bring an anointing with the Spirit; water and blood flow from the side of Jesus (this seen as Jesus' will). Here in this prayer past events are not described on their own merits but rather through the new lens of Christ in his own baptism and in his death and resurrection. Everything is redefined and given meaning as it relates to this new reality – life in Jesus Christ. That which for the Hebrew people is liberating (read salvific in Christian terms) is now co-opted as a sign for Christian people. This is language of displacement theology where Christ is seen over and against all that was, replacing a people and their history and fulfilling it. A chart will show how this theology is present in the Vigil. The examples come from all four parts of the Easter Vigil.

Israel	<i>is replaced by</i>	the true sons of Abraham
Israel		God's holy people; the Church
the Red Sea		waters of baptism
waters of the great flood		waters of baptism
an end of sin		a new beginning of goodness
a lamb		Christ, the Lamb
human birth		rebirth; birth in water and the Holy Spirit
preaching, witness of prophets		preaching, witness of Christ
covenant with Moses		covenant with Christ
sacrifice of Abraham		sacrifice of Christ
gifts offered by Melchisedek		bread and wine / Christ's body and blood
wonder of creation		new creation (in Christ)
wonder of our creation		the greater wonder of our redemption.

Displacement theology is a concern for feminists.³⁷ Ann Patrick Ware notes that over the years the Church's prayer texts have changed to be less offensive³⁸ but she believes that more is needed. She asks why it is we cannot see and present Jesus within his own

³⁷ It is important to point to the presence of displacement theology in the Easter Vigil as it reflects an attitude of domination. An in-depth study of displacement theology would belong in a different paper.

³⁸ The example she offers is the reference to the 'unseeing' Jews in the Good Friday litany, praying that they be brought out of their darkness into the light that is Christ.

tradition. “Must all Christology, [she writes,] be ‘displacement’ or ‘fulfillment’ theology?”³⁹ As said earlier displacement runs close to dualism which ecofeminism decries.

The highly paschal dimension of the blessing of baptismal water presents a marked change from its predecessor. The blessing in the Pius V Missal used almost exclusively a language of regeneration. Where the waters of the flood signified regeneration they are in the present text sign of the waters of baptism. In the words of the earlier missal the priest prayed “multiply within her [thy church] thy acts of regeneration ... openest to the whole world the font of baptism for the renewal of the nations,” and today we pray “unseal the fountain of baptism ... give to the water of this font the grace of your Son ... cleanse him [man – sic] from sin in a new birth of innocence.” The earlier text calls the Holy Ghost [sic] to descend into the brimming font making the water fruitful in regenerative power. In the present text the Spirit gives to the water the grace of the Son that those baptized may share in Jesus’ death and resurrection. The earlier text is not devoid of the language of rebirth; it prays for rebirth into a new creation, a new infancy. Note the several images of the water metaphor: fount of life, water of new birth, purifying stream, bath of salvation. This multivalent character is at best implicit in the present text; it depends on the imagination of the participant to surface these images.

Dominic Serra has traced the various revisions of the blessing of baptismal water with reference to the ancient texts. He considers the exclusively paschal dimension of the present text to be a “significant shortcoming” and calls for further revision.

³⁹ Ware, “The Easter Vigil,” p. 93.

The principles of the liturgical reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council assure us that our present text is not to be taken as the final word. It is hoped that future revisions of this blessing ... will strike a balance between the metaphors of pasch and regeneration. ... Future revisions of the blessing of baptismal water at the paschal vigil ought to reflect the fullness of this mystery.⁴⁰

A return to the language of regeneration would be helpful for ecofeminists; it is a natural process found within creation itself, and would signify our participation in those rhythms. We need this language of regeneration; we also need to retain some of the language of paschal mystery.

Exorcism

The exorcism in the prayer of blessing poses further challenges and ambiguity. In the Roman Missal of Pius V and in our present blessing the holiness of water is affirmed. "At the very dawn of creation [the] Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness." From creation, water is holy; yet now it will be exorcised. Ecofeminism speaks out against the degradation of creation. The message is mixed. How does water lose the capacity for holiness, if not to say that what was is now not enough? Whilst the waters of creation are a wellspring of holiness, they are not yet ready or having the capacity or means of rebirth or regeneration; they must first be filled with the grace of the Son. The water so blessed is water for rebirth, but there are no birthing images. There are no references to the fecundity of water in sustaining the life of all variety of sea creatures and indeed humans.

The earlier blessing of baptismal water included a lengthier, quite visual exorcism: "Begone then every unclean spirit at thy bidding, Lord; begone all wicked and satanic

⁴⁰ Dominic E. Serra, "The Blessing of Baptismal Water at the Paschal Vigil: Ancient Texts and Modern Revisions," in *Worship*, 64 (March 1990), 156.

wiles. Let no power of opposition intrude here, or spread its snares about this place, or creep into it by stealth, or taint it by its poison.” Again we see the degradation of creation, the use of non-human creature imagery to portray evil: note the words snares, creep, stealth and thus an allusion, I think, to the serpent in Genesis 3. Dominic Serra sees this prayer as an exorcism of the water.⁴¹ What remains today is a shorter exorcism: “You created man [sic] in your own likeness: cleanse him [sic] from sin in a new birth of innocence by water and the Spirit.” It seems that evil is now situated in the human person, more specifically the male. A positive change in that non-human creatures are not degraded, but a negative change in that man exclusively images God and is cleansed from sin. Women are simply left out. The clear exorcism of water is gone but retained is the displacement of one kind and action of water for another: the waters of the great flood and the Red Sea for the waters of baptism; a woman’s watery womb with the “font of grace” or as in the earlier missal the “stainless womb of this divine font” [*ab immaculate divini fontis útero*]. Maternity is lifted from its human reality; wombs are not spotless, rather they are messy. Impregnated by the Holy Spirit, enlivened and sanctified now by the Light of Christ, the womb becomes virginal, a contradiction in terms. Women in their unique capacity to give birth become at best secondary and at worst dispensable. While a return to womb symbolism would be helpful, the imagery around it must change to account for the foregoing ecofeminist critique.

⁴¹ For some ancient people water was experienced as a habitat for demons; such a notion may have influenced this exorcism and sanctification of water. Serra states that today material objects require exorcism by virtue of the sacred use for which it is destined. See “The Blessing of Baptismal Water at the Paschal Vigil,” p. 148.

While the Easter Vigil is anthropocentric in that humanity is the object of God's action in Christ through the Spirit, the blessing of baptismal water carries a still more exclusive note. Reference is made to Jesus' command to "teach all nations, baptizing them" yet one short sentence later the priest-presider prays "you created *man* in your own likeness: cleanse *him* from sin." This androcentric and patriarchal phrasing is clearly in contradiction with Jesus' own words.

Epiclesis

To speak of the "power" of the Holy Spirit moves away from that creative breath of the Spirit at the beginning of the blessing. Wisdom literature speaks so richly and at length of the activity of the Spirit – Sophia. Perhaps allusions to these texts would enrich and expand this prayer in a way that engages Spirit, water and humanity in life-affirming relationship.

During the final part (epiclesis) of the blessing of baptismal water the priest-presider may lower the Easter candle into the water either once or three times, while praying:

We ask you, Father, with your Son to send the Holy Spirit
upon the waters of this font.

Now he holds the candle in the water, and continues:

May all who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism
rise also with him to newness of life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The candle is taken out of the water as the people sing:

Springs of water, bless the Lord. Give him glory and praise for ever.

Once impregnated with the Spirit and filled with the Light of Christ, water has the capacity to act as subject, cleansing and giving rebirth.

This ritual action of placing the Easter candle in the water of the font and taking it out dripping deserves thorough examination. As with all symbolism this sign is multivalent. Water is a necessary source and sustainer of life, refreshing and cleansing, yet potentially death-dealing. It is also a highly sexual sign. At first glance it seems a positive thing to recognize and celebrate sexuality. Philip Pfatteicher holds this view. He describes this font-womb of mother church as brimming with fecund indivisible water. The phallic candle, symbol of Christ, inserted into the womb-font for him speaks of "the intimate union of God with each baptized person and of each of the baptized with one another." He continues: "Sex in the liturgy shows the transcendence of the duality of self and other, of male and female, of God and humanity."⁴² When the Christian tradition so clearly and over most of its history identifies the male person with Christ, and as an institution continues to claim that only a male can image Christ as priest, it seems impossible for this one action to erase that consciousness and history and to speak of the woman as a full partner.

While some women see in this action of dipping the candle into the water a wonderfully sexual symbol, others disagree. Ann Patrick Ware writes:

Clearly a phallic symbol, it [the Easter candle] represents Christ leading the people, enlightening the world. Its form carries the message that a man, Christ, leads, and women are expected to follow. As the lighting of the smaller tapers indicates, it is from this Light that all other light proceeds.⁴³

This ritual action is experienced as highly patriarchal. Susan Roll sees the lowering of the candle into the water as a visible allusion to intercourse. Further, if water is seen as death, [creating a relationship with a woman's watery womb], then we are reborn in this baptismal

⁴² Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality*, p. 99.

⁴³ Ware, "The Easter Vigil," p. 87.

water, undoing the sinfulness of natural birth.⁴⁴ Clearly this would be demeaning of women, reinforcing dualistic thinking and a nature/culture split.

Rubrics for this coming together of candle and water use variously terms like lower, dip or plunge. These words all come from the Paul V text, Latin edition, which used three different words: *demitto* (to sink, settle, lie down, forgive sins), *mergo* (to sink, immerse, plunge, overwhelm), *immergo* (to dip into, immerse, plunge, merge). These words raise significantly different experiences. The water (of the womb-font) is described in terms of passivity, a waiting vessel and an object. Yet water is first subject. And whether the candle is dipped, lowered, or more horribly plunged into the water, her cooperation seems unnecessary. At its least offensive the language is about subtle domination (she passively receives the Spirit and Christ the Light); in a more horrifying way it is about rape (the Easter Candle is plunged into her)! Think of the heightening energy in the rubrics of the Pius V Missal: in each of the three movements the Easter candle is placed further in, finally to the depths, and each time in a higher pitch. If the image is to be about fecundity and birth, then language to indicate the coming together of the two would be more true, more valuing in dignity and holiness. This would reflect a more ecological, and thus ecofeminist frame of partnership and interconnectedness. While ritual cannot be defined by every cultural context, the interpretation and experience is no less valid. The hermeneutic moment continues and those in the ministry of liturgy would do well to be aware and sensitive. Is this action ever exegeted? The subconscious or subliminal effect of this ritual action must not be underestimated. Symbol and metaphor work at the level of conscious and subconscious.

⁴⁴ Roll, "Risen to New Life," p. 11.

Initiation

The baptism of the Elect follows. Their proclamation of faith includes a threefold renunciation of sin. Then clothed in a white garment they receive a candle, the Light of Christ. The celebration of confirmation follows with an invitation to prayer, laying on of hands and anointing with chrism. The rite continues as the whole assembly renews its baptismal promises through a renunciation of sin and profession of faith, and is sprinkled with blessed water. The general intercessions conclude this section of the Easter Vigil.

The baptism and confirmation of women and men, or perhaps children, at the Easter Vigil allows those in the assembly opportunity to reflect deeply on their own initiation, to experience the rich meaning of water and oil and what happens to them in their experience of it. As discussed earlier the position and size of the baptismal font and the quantity of water used shape experience and understanding. Is there plenty of water that it might be seen and heard? Is there water enough to be felt, to be enveloped in and emerge a changed person? When the assembly is sprinkled with water, is time and water taken to reach each one? At confirmation does the presider place his hands on the neophyte, or does he extend them over the group? The physical touch is important and not to be dispensed to "save time." Is the baptized person lavished with oil that it can be seen, felt and its fragrance known? It is my experience that the symbol of light in the Vigil is attended to (even if with varying effects) but water and oil are given less heed. The kind of fonts and the spaces in which Christians worship often confine or stifle their capacity to know, experience and understand the life-giving waters of baptism. A little dab of chrism will not suffice. Experience involving the whole person (so important to Kavanagh and to ecofeminists) is lost; initiation becomes a head-trip, a disembodied "act of faith." When the assembly

cannot be near, see or hear, their full conscious active participation is at best hampered and at worst non-existent. This too is evidence of hierarchical dualism where embodied experience is subordinate to intellectual knowledge and assent. But truth be told, the two are inseparable. An ecological paradigm for initiation demands that we see, hear and get involved in the action and with each other.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

In this final piece of the Easter Vigil we settle into a familiar rhythm for it is closest to our usual Sunday experience of Eucharist. The preparation of the gifts, eucharistic prayer, communion and dismissal will bring the Easter Vigil to a close. Important as it is to the Easter Vigil, it is not extraordinary. Significant attention has been given to Light, Word and Baptism for nowhere else than in the Easter Vigil are they celebrated in like fashion. That said the Liturgy of the Eucharist deserves some comment. It is true that at first glance Eucharist is rooted in creation. Bread and wine are “gift of the earth and fruit of the vine,” “work of human hands.” The creation shaped here is at first glance ecological; earth, sun, wheat, grapes and human labour are interconnected; they cooperate and something new is given: bread and wine.

But in an ecofeminist critique we must ask: is it readily apparent that bread and wine are gift of the earth and fruit of the vine? Is the bread we eat real bread (baked, broken and shared) or plastic wafer? Can we touch, taste, smell and eat? Using wafers removes us from keeping in touch with agrarian cycles of planting and harvesting. Producing bread and wine requires that we cooperate with cycles of nature. Communities with women or men who bake bread for the gathered assembly will have a different and

perhaps deeper appreciation of Eucharist. Do we all drink (not dip a host) of one cup, taking in its bouquet, or is the priest-presider the only one who drinks? Where and how are bread and wine produced? Does our bread come from wheat treated with pesticides and that is bio-engineered, or is it organically grown? Is our wine from local crops and vintners (where this is available)? If we do not use real bread and wine it becomes impossible to speak of Eucharist as dining and feasting in God's reign. It is difficult to imagine a "church doing world." Perhaps that is why this metaphor is so difficult to pass on.

Other cosmic and creation references create ambivalence. The Sanctus is cosmic in scope, heaven and earth are full of God's glory, but the hymn is one that belongs to the choirs of angels in heaven. Given that the Christian tradition has presented heaven and earth as separate – up there and down here, a dualist world is implicit. Eucharistic Prayer IV, especially in its own preface, is the most cosmic/creation centred. Kevin Irwin and Joseph Keenan both draw attention to its creation-centeredness.⁴⁵ Neither of them, however, draws attention to the exclusively male language and hierarchy in this prayer. Eucharistic Prayer IV is overtly patriarchal in its liberal use of "man" and "men" who formed in the Father's [sic] image are set over the whole world ... to rule over all creatures. It is unacceptable to pray this prayer in our communities; it is not life giving for women and the earth.

If we attend to the critique of ecofeminism we would do well to surface the theme of sacrifice introduced first in the preparation of altar and gifts. The offering to God of bread and wine is a sacrifice (mentioned three times). The preface says: "we praise you

⁴⁵ Kevin Irwin, "The Sacramentality of Creation," pp. 116-117; Joseph Keenan, "The Importance of the Creation Motif in a Eucharistic Prayer," *Worship*, 53/4 (July 1979), pp. 348-356.

with greater joy than ever on this Easter night, when Christ became our paschal sacrifice ... who took away the sins of the world.” In Eucharistic Prayer I the word sacrifice is used a further five times. Sacrifice and redemption are the primary metaphors. It was noted above how difficult the notion of sacrifice is for women. Positive metaphors for female shedding of blood and giving life do not surface in the Christian tradition. In fact female shedding of blood is seen as impure, a defilement. The point of this paper is to surface the difficulty and ambiguity. The exploration of the themes of sacrifice, salvation and redemption as they are understood and experienced by women are detailed and critiqued at length in other places.⁴⁶

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is also patriarchal. Jesus Christ is named Lord, true Lamb, Son, God. We meet him in his humanity as the one who took bread ... gave thanks ... broke the bread; took the cup ... gave to eat and drink. God is addressed as Lord, Father, all-powerful and ever-living, almighty, God of glory and majesty. It is primarily men who are singled out in the first eucharistic prayer. Like in the Litany of Saints twenty-four apostles and martyrs are honoured here – all of them male; Abel, Abraham and Melchisedech are remembered; we ask a share in the fellowship of a further fifteen apostles and martyrs – only seven of them women, and only early Christian virgins and martyrs.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the least dynamic and engaging part of the Easter Vigil.

The priest does it all: offers the prayers, does lengthy reading, consecrates the bread and wine, displays them to the people, invites to Communion, dispenses Communion (which people “receive”), and dismisses the congregation [or a male

⁴⁶ See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

deacon may do this]. Having an occasional woman eucharistic minister positioned here and there is no countervailing.⁴⁷

It is perhaps because of this that the dominance of the male priest-presider is so jarring. The male priest-presider would seem to support Eucharist as sacrifice. The early church however held a fuller meal as part of its celebration. Food was shared by all and with the poor in their midst. Eucharist celebrates and enacts the effects of redemption – right relationship, more than the act of redemption itself. Long vertical spaces for worship, plastic wafers and no drinking from the cup cannot speak of Eucharist as meal, nor about the relationships in the kingdom world-in-the-making.

Summary

This chapter has attended to the nature of symbol and metaphor and explored how they play in the elements of the Easter Vigil: Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist. Celebrating the Easter Vigil shapes a theology of creation that when critiqued through an ecofeminist lens, bears ambiguous results at best. Ecofeminism supports an ecological paradigm. The elements of an ecological paradigm are present in light, the imagery of some psalms and scripture readings, water, oil, bread and wine. How they are present and function is important. When embraced with joyous abandon we reverence creation and begin to realise ourselves as participants in creation. Yet throughout the Easter Vigil the ritual actions and language around these symbols shape a theology of creation that is anthropocentric, patriarchal, denigrating of women and creation, hierarchical and dualist. The question that remains is: how can we move forward? What might an ecofeminist re-visioning of the Easter Vigil look like?

⁴⁷ Ware, "The Easter Vigil," p. 103.

CONCLUSION

The celebration of the Easter Vigil is a privileged locus for an exploration of *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. It is a microcosm of liturgical praxis: in its cosmic, temporal and rich symbolic dimensions; in its celebration of the Lord's Day, as anamnesis of the saving mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection; in initiation into Christian living; in shaping a world, creation. Liturgy does indeed shape believing and living; liturgy is, to use Kavanagh's words, church doing world. Liturgy offers a way of living. So the Easter Vigil holds up a theology of creation that shapes believing and living. The question I asked of this: "is this world, this creation, liberating for women and the earth?"

I approached this question in two ways. First the thesis is grounded in Aidan Kavanagh's approach to liturgical theology. He sees two movements in liturgical theology: *theologia prima* and *theologia secunda*. In this thesis this is an integrated action. In the manner of *theologia prima*, celebrating the Easter Vigil was explored in its cosmic, historical and aesthetic context, and elements of Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist. For Kavanagh liturgy is "church doing world" and as such opens up a way of being. Second, in the movement of *theologia secunda*, I drew on the discipline of ecofeminism to surface the ways in which celebrating the Easter Vigil is liberating, or not, for women and the earth.

Celebration of the Easter Vigil ought to lead to a transformation of creation that is liberatory for all: creatures, humanity, earth. We are not about celebrating a fully present reality, but an eschatological one. We are about entering a process of encounter, change

and adaptation. Yet in experience and in human action this process is not always life-giving. Women do not always experience the Vigil as liberating, respectful or healing of themselves and the earth. Daily we can read about the domination and exploitation of earth and people: pollution of air and water, lack of space to dispose of our garbage, deforestation, global warming, "natural" disasters, genetic engineering, loss of species, population issues, racism, gender-based oppression and violence, classism; the list is endless. How are we to live in the face of these issues? Again, can celebration of the Easter Vigil and its shaping of creation offer a hope-filled word?

In her book *From Apocalypse to Genesis* ecofeminist Anne Primavesi offers two paradigms for our consideration: an ecological paradigm and a hierarchical paradigm. Using ecofeminism as a lens for celebrating the Easter Vigil reveals a theology of creation that is deeply entrenched in a hierarchical paradigm and also one that has the capacity to be ecological. So this exploration looked at where a theology of creation was shaped that was organic, interconnected, participative and interdependent. It looked at where a theology of creation was marked by separation and utilitarianism, and by patriarchy, gender bias and hierarchical dualism.

An ecofeminist revision of the Easter Vigil would make the following suggestions: greater attention to cosmic dimensions including awareness of time as cosmic, rather than narrowly Christological; fuller liturgical roles for women; attention to aesthetic language; changes to the celebration of Light, Word, Baptism and Eucharist. Consider each one.

The Easter Vigil is a cosmic celebration with ancient roots. The Easter Vigil's cosmic dimensions have the capacity to support an ecological paradigm, in so far as it relates to the earth, non-human creation. An ecofeminist revision of the Easter Vigil would

have us pay greater attention to the Vigil's cosmic proportions: to its ancient dating and roots in the cycle of seasons: night, full moon and spring equinox. In this way the overtly anthropocentric dimensions of the Vigil will at least be mitigated. But we must not stop at the cosmic and cyclical rhythms. Ecofeminism calls our attention to the ever new unfolding of the universe story, rather than seeing creation as a *fait accompli*. One could consider incorporating an awareness of the continuing unfolding of the universe in the Exsultet and the Blessing of Water. How might the church's use of the Genesis creation story be shifted by today's cosmology? This kind of awareness is largely absent in the Easter Vigil. An ecofeminist revision would have us pay attention to light/candles, water, oil, bread and wine. It would have us pay attention to the materials of objects, vestments and furniture that they reflect the gifts of creation. So there would be beeswax candles shining in the darkness like the light of the moon, plenty of flowing water lavishly experienced, natural rather than artificial materials, artisanship rather than mass-produced items that demean all of creation, human and non-human.

But more than mitigation of the Vigil's anthropocentric, patriarchal and hierarchical dimensions is necessary. Can we not pay attention to humanity and its experience of divine action without being submissive and exploiting of women and the earth, or patriarchally benevolent? While the cosmic and temporal dimensions of the Easter Vigil pay attention to earth, they cannot be liberating of women and the earth on their own. Ecofeminism has demonstrated that Nature and woman are linked in patterns of domination and exploitation. There is potential to experience a theology of creation that is more life giving for the earth, but the same does not follow for women. An ecofeminist revision of the Easter Vigil can shift the anthropocentric focus with some effort, but I believe it is more difficult to shift the

androcentric focus that is subtle and deeply embedded in traditional understandings of theological themes. Perhaps it is only possible to celebrate the Easter Vigil with the *appearance* of an ecological paradigm where cosmic and earth dimensions are concerned. In living it is possible to have the semblance of addressing domination and exploitation but still be governed by a subliminal, unconscious, and therefore more dangerous form of patriarchy.

Liturgy must allow for fuller liturgical roles for women, including female presiders. Imagine how differently a theology of creation would be shaped if a woman announced the Light and a new reality under the resurrection of Jesus; proclaimed a Word that was liberating for all and imaged right relationships; prayed a blessing of water that spoke a language of regeneration as well as paschal mystery, that spoke of womb and birth; baptized; blessed, broke and shared bread and wine. Liturgical roles for women have been a part of the life of the church from its beginnings – sometimes hidden, sometimes not. But it must also be said that conflict around those roles has also been ever present. Today women are creating a new liturgical history.¹ In fact women and laity “preach” or break open the Word in Sunday Celebrations of the Word, but in the guise of a “reflection.” Women today are engaged in liturgy but by creating new liturgies, alongside or instead of the official public liturgy of Eucharist and Sacraments. Women must have a recognised place in both.

The language of liturgy must change, in its spoken word and spatial language. Women must find themselves reflected positively in the liturgy; women and men both must

¹ See Teresa Berger, *Women's Ways of Worship: Gender Analysis and Liturgical History* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1999). Berger details the role gender plays, with its ups and downs, in women's liturgical history.

find images and metaphors of God that are not confining or limiting. If they are to reflect God as personal and gendered, then both genders must be recognised. Greater use of metaphors drawing on creation (e.g. light, fire, wind, rock, breath) would be helpful. The space we worship in shapes movement and understanding of relationships. Communities who worship in a space that easily reflects the transcendence and glory of God must work hard to create an awareness of God's immanence and bond people and ritual action together. Those in smaller intimate gatherings would do well to reflect on how their celebration can point beyond themselves to be inclusive of a larger church and aware of our eschatological reality. Special effort to engage the assembly on a multiplicity of levels will ensure that all senses are involved: sight, sound, head, heart, touch and smell. The more opportunities there are to be engaged, the greater the chance for the assembly's full, conscious and active participation called for in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In these ways a fuller experience of cosmic and temporal dimensions may be possible. A theology of creation that is life giving for women and the earth may be possible.

The Easter Vigil starts with the Service of Light and must begin at night (not daylight or dusk). This may mean that the Vigil starts at a different time each year, perhaps earlier if Easter falls in early March, later if it is celebrated at the end of April. The Vigil, in celebrating the passage from death to life, of passion and resurrection, is physically and emotionally demanding; the Vigil is lengthy, time consuming. Why try to weaken the night and cosmic dimensions of the Vigil so we don't have to stay up so late? The Easter Vigil is what it is, in that sense. The Gospel doesn't only ask for what's easy. Turning on lights after the tapers are lit and as the Exsultet begins (as the rubrics suggest) may lessen the dramatic effect many have grown accustomed to, but will not add symbolic value to the

language of displacement and dualism that already exists in the Exsultet. Use of the alternate translation of the Exsultet, found in the (rejected) 1998 revision of the Canadian Sacramentary will strengthen the cosmic language; it better reflects the scope and action of creation. In addition a setting of the Exsultet that involves the assembly in the singing may help the assembly be more fully engaged. More fully cosmic language will not be sufficient. Other language of the Exsultet needs significant reworking: as noted the language is patriarchal, dualist, triumphal and violent; at times androcentric, and also anthropocentric. Talented feminist and ecofeminist theologians, poets, liturgists and scripture scholars, working together and rooted in an ecological paradigm, will find ways to talk about, and celebrate in liturgy, death and resurrection, paschal mystery, without boxing God into one set of metaphors, without denigrating women (and men) and the earth.²

In the Liturgy of the Word, notwithstanding the imagery of light, water and fruitfulness, one encounters patriarchy with its language of domination, devaluing and even exclusion of women. A re-visioning of this liturgy would demand that the full Genesis text of creation be proclaimed so as to include other than human creation. Granted that does not solve the language of dominion in the final verses but there are feminist interpretations of the text, including the one Primavesi offers in *From Apocalypse to Genesis*. Some texts might be omitted (e.g. the second, fourth and sixth readings) or new texts added. It would be good to explore the appropriateness of the following: Prov. 8:22-31 (linking creation and wisdom); wisdom texts such as Wis. 6:1-11 (leaders exhorted to desire wisdom), 6:12-25;

² I believe women (Rosemary Radford Ruether, Theresa Berger, Lesley Northup and Susan Roll to name a few) are doing this work but they are not placed, nor allowed space, to do this in a way that more significantly impacts the official tradition. Women are having to create their own traditions more than reshape our traditional liturgies, including Sunday Eucharist.

7:22 – 8:1 (the nature of wisdom); 10:15-21 (wisdom and exodus); Sir. 1, 24 (in praise of wisdom); Isa. 58 (living in right relationship, a metaphor of light rising); Rev. 21 (an alternate text for the New Jerusalem). And if there is to be a sacrifice story, consider what a feminist rendering of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:29-39) would do (note the role the daughter plays) in place of the sacrifice of Abraham?³ Stories of women, as well as men, must be included. New prayers following the readings and psalms could be written to better exegete the readings for today. Perhaps this is a place where the flexibility of liturgical texts as known to the early church could be returned; prayers for use in a local church could help us hear the scripture texts in our present circumstances (of oppression, pollution of water, starving people) and could help by our words to open up a new way of being.

The Liturgy of Baptism could also benefit from an ecofeminist re-visioning. The Litany of Saints must include more women and a variety of models of Christian living. The Blessing of Water needs extensive reworking. The language of displacement needs be changed to respect all aspects of salvation history; some of the earlier language of regeneration could be brought back to the prayer; inserting the paschal candle into the water should be omitted; water and oil must be used lavishly. Metaphors that speak to the fertility of a woman's womb and of water should be included. These changes would go a long way toward praying in a way that is life giving for women and the earth. We would begin to live out of a theology of creation that is liberating for women – indeed all people – and the earth.

³ My intention is to get us thinking widely; admittedly this story with a different exegesis could work to support dualism and the degrading of women.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist celebrates Christ's self-giving, sacrifice, meal and union. A eucharistic prayer that emphasises thanksgiving, the root meaning of eucharist, may begin to offset these themes but needs to be inclusive of and remember more than an androcentric salvation history. Female presiders at this table would do much to draw out an experience of eucharist as meal for our usual associations place women as the gatherers of food, and those who prepare and host a meal.

At the heart of the Easter Vigil and its theology of creation is paschal mystery. How do we celebrate and talk about this mystery of Christ's death and resurrection in ways that are not hierarchical, that instead are ecological? How do we celebrate and speak about the cosmic-temporal dimensions in the Easter Vigil without equating resurrection with the cyclical movement of seasons, with spring? After all, as both Chupungco and Pfatteicher reminded us, resurrection is not equal to spring. These are perhaps the biggest challenges I see. Although in her thesis she searches for an ecological sacramental theology, and is therefore not involved specifically in liturgical theology, Dorothy McDougall perhaps shows us a way forward. She explores an "ecological-egalitarian" rather than sacramental model for theology, one that is rooted in subjectivity and interdependence. She makes a case for seeing cosmos as primary sacrament.⁴ It is worth repeating here an earlier quotation: "The natural world has an innate value and not only reveals but also can be said to encounter divine presence as a *subject* of cosmogenesis and its processes."⁵ If the natural world is subject, we are subjects together and action in one system has an effect, however apparent or unapparent, on the other.

⁴ McDougall, *The Cosmos as Primary Sacrament*, chapter four.

⁵ McDougall, *The Cosmos as Primary Sacrament*, p. 112.

In conclusion, in celebrating the Easter Vigil, Christians shape a theology of creation that is dynamic and moving. The ecofeminist critique asks whether that creation is shaped along ecological or hierarchical paradigms, whether it is liberating for women and the earth. This thesis has shown that there are elements that can foster an ecological way of being. It has also shown that in celebrating the Easter Vigil, Christians create a world that reflects a deeply hierarchical paradigm and is thus not life giving for women and the earth. There is greater potential for a theology of creation that is more life giving for the earth than for women. Much in the Vigil needs to be changed. Attention to the cosmic dimensions of time, Sunday, full moon, spring equinox and night, and attention to earth symbols such as fire, water, oil, bread and wine will help Christians to live ecologically and to similarly shape the society in which we live. However this is not sufficient to transform in way liberating for women (and so all people) and the earth, the deeply hierarchical paradigm.

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