

Louis Weil. *Liturgical Sense: The Logic of Rite*. New York: Seabury Books, 2013. 140 pages. \$14.44.

*Liturgical Sense: The Logic of Rite* is the first of an occasional series of books by Louis Weil to highlight his most significant insights into liturgical theology and practice gained over the course of a career as priest, liturgical scholar and reformer, and professor in liturgics. Written in particular for priests and other worship leaders in The Episcopal Church, this volume focuses on historical developments in the theology and practice of presiding at the Eucharist, with special attention to how the Eucharistic rites and rubrics of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church* represent a significant if not complete recovery of early Christian liturgical celebration in general and presiding in particular.

At the heart of this book lies one key concern. Weil hopes presiders at the Eucharist may become more open channels of the full participation of the gathered assembly through their reflection on and practices of presiding. To that end, Weil briefly traces the history of theological and practical changes in Western Eucharistic rites from early Christianity until the present day. He notes the scholarship on early Christianity disclosed a theology and practice of “full, conscious, actual” participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice by the whole assembly of the baptized led by their presider. This dynamic shifted toward a theology and practices of “priestly confection” and primarily visual participation by people from the Middle Ages roughly through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since that time, the results of liturgical scholarship and the consequent ecumenical liturgical renewal movements across the Western Churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have led many denominations to develop new rites or new teaching and rubrics about the rites, thereby embodying a shift once again to “full, conscious and actual” participation by the whole assembly.

Weil argues the long history in Western churches of the people functioning as full participants only in their own devotional acts while the priest or pastor “confects” the sacrament on their behalf will not be overcome by changing the language of the rites alone. How the presider presides matters much for how the people will understand their own role in the Eucharistic sacrifice. If the presider simply continues the same practices associated with priestly confection by special words and gestures, as he notes many Episcopal priests did after the adoption of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, the people will likely continue to perceive the priest’s role and theirs in no different ways than before.

Thus, Weil notes, how presiders preside cannot be left up simply to the whims or preferences of individual presiders. Presiding must be worked out in both teaching and listening to the people among whom they serve. Presiders need to teach the people how to claim and enact their role as full participants. And presiders must listen to the people to discern how or what they are doing as presiders is enabling or blocking their full participation. Ultimately, Weil argues, the only ritual action presiders may need to offer at the Eucharist, apart from the fraction at its conclusion, is the common prayer posture of *orans*: “Doing nothing, yet doing everything.”

To be sure, *Liturgical Sense* is written by an Episcopalian primarily for Episcopalians and other Christian presiders and worship leaders in the Anglican traditions. Yet this particularity of focus is what gives this book its power for presiders in many Western traditions. He has provided enough of the trajectory of both Roman and Reformed traditions of Eucharistic presiding that non-Anglicans can discover their place within his narrative of liturgical history and liturgical renewal. He has also modeled in his careful reflection on the development of Anglican and

Episcopal rites how such reflection might bear good fruit when applied to one's own tradition. As such, *Liturgical Sense* may rightly find its way onto required book lists for seminary classes on worship and liturgical theology, into workshops for continuing education of clergy, and even in congregational study groups seeking to understand the history and meaning of their own Eucharistic ritual and practices far beyond its explicitly Episcopalian primary audience.

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