

# **RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS AS A METHOD FOR LITURGICAL THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO ZIMMERMAN**

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the extent to which the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics according to Joyce Ann Zimmerman can be a method for Liturgical Theology to understand the process of communication of faith during the Liturgy for the Church in the postmodern era. With the need to deepen the interdisciplinary dialogue between liturgy and other branches of science, this paper aims to delineate the point of convergence between Liturgical Theology and hermeneutics to create a more relevant application for Christians today. For this purpose, the methodology used in this paper is a literature study to dialogue Zimmerman's thoughts with other thinkers focusing on the application of hermeneutics in Liturgical Theology. This paper finds that the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics according to Zimmerman can map the linguistic dynamics of liturgical celebrations to enable the transformation of the entire narrative of their life experiences into a narrative of faith. Nevertheless, this method needs to be complemented by the hermeneutics of real dialogical actions with the mystery of God action as a trigger for a deeper transformation of mystical experience in the liturgy towards social ethics.

**Keywords:** hermeneutics, linguistic dynamics, participation, distancing, appropriation, understanding

**Abstrak:** Makalah ini mempertanyakan sejauh mana penerapan hermeneutika Ricoeur menurut Joyce Ann Zimmerman bisa menjadi metode bagi Teologi Liturgi untuk memahami proses komunikasi iman dalam Liturgi di era postmodern. Dengan adanya kebutuhan untuk memperdalam dialog interdisipliner antara liturgi dan cabang-cabang ilmu lainnya, makalah ini bertujuan memperuncing titik temu antara Teologi Liturgi dan hermeneutika demi aplikasi yang lebih rele-

van bagi umat di masa kini. Metodologi yang digunakan dalam makalah ini adalah studi pustaka dengan mendialogkan pemikiran Zimmerman dengan pemikir-pemikir lainnya yang berfokus pada penerapan hermeneutika di bidang Teologi Liturgi. Ditemukan bahwa penerapan hermeneutika Ricoeur menurut Zimmerman dapat memetakan dinamika linguistik dari perayaan liturgi yang memungkinkan transformasi seluruh narasi pengalaman hidup mereka menjadi narasi iman. Meski demikian, menurut penulis metode ini perlu dilengkapi dengan hermeneutika tindakan dialogal liturgis konkret dengan misteri ilahi sebagai pemicu transformasi pengalaman mistik dalam liturgi yang lebih mendalam, menuju ke etika sosial.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** hermeneutika, dinamika linguistik, partisipasi, distansiasi, apropriasi, pemahaman

## INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism, as a reaction to the metanarrative tendency of modernity, has shifted our understanding of culture. Robert Schreiter describes postmodern culture as the “ground of contest in relations.”<sup>1</sup> Amplified by the process of globalization, postmodern culture brings its own theological challenge not only to the way we respect religious pluralism,<sup>2</sup> but also to the way we construct and symbolize our relations with the world, church, and neighbors.<sup>3</sup> Postmodernism invites each culture to create its own narratives of meanings and their symbols. Hermeneutics,

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1 Robert Schreiter, quoted from Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 220.

2 Schreiter, p. xix: “Needless to say, this new cultural, socio-political, and religious context ... presents difficult challenges to the Church and theology. ... *Religiously*, how can the church not only respect but also incorporate into its own life and worship the teachings and practices of other religions in order to be enriched and transformed by them.”

3 Peter Phan, quoted from his introduction on Nathan Mitchell's *Meeting Mystery*: “But how is liturgy to be celebrated today, in postmodernity, when the meanings of these realities – world, church, and neighbor – have changed radically? What shape will liturgy take when the world is no longer ... the center of the universe, when the ‘globe’ has become truly global?” Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), p. ix.

then, becomes increasingly needed as the apparatus to celebrate the existence of those various narratives.

In liturgical theology, hermeneutics has becoming one of the multidisciplinary partners in understanding the communication process between liturgical texts and postmodern Christians. Its' role is to extract meaning from both the liturgical texts of a particular rite *and* the dialogue of those texts with the "personal liturgy"<sup>4</sup> of the participants. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, one of the prominent theologians in liturgical studies, offers a tool to understand the application of hermeneutics in liturgy.<sup>5</sup> In her work *Liturgy as Language of Faith*<sup>6</sup>, she applies Paul Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics as a method to capture the "linguistics dynamics of forming Christian existence and experience".<sup>7</sup>

Based on Zimmerman's work, I am inquiring about the extent of Ricoeurian hermeneutics in understanding the engagement process with liturgical texts. First, I will describe Zimmerman's understanding of Ricoeurian hermeneutics of the liturgical texts. Second, I will explain how Zimmerman applies Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics to the liturgical context. Third, I will try to analyze the strengths and the limitations of this textual hermeneutics to delineate its' role in liturgy of postmodern context. Fourth, I will propose another perspective for Ricoeur's hermeneutic applied by Zimmerman and its complementary by the postmodern sacramental view of Keenan Osborne and Nathan Mitchell's view on a

4 David W. Fagerberg recognized the need to acknowledge that "[m]undane liturgical theology is curious about the spiritual mathematics of this liturgical lever. Its attention, therefore, expands beyond the Church sanctuary, where the liturgy is done in life. The sacramental liturgy and our personal liturgy are connected." David W. Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2016), p. 94.

5 Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics: American Essays in Liturgy*, ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 39: "Since liturgy involves text, it makes sense to say that liturgy involves interpretation. Therefore, hermeneutics is an important discipline for anyone engaged seriously in liturgical studies."

6 Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith: A Liturgical Methodology in the Mode of Paul Ricoeur's Textual Hermeneutics* (Boston: University Press of America, 1988).

7 Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Religious Ritual with Ricoeur: Between Fragility and Hope* (London: Lexington Books, 2021), p. 66.

postmodern ritual. I will conclude with a review of methodology for liturgy that tries to answer the challenge of the postmodern world.

## **ZIMMERMAN'S VIEW ON RICOEUR'S TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS**

One of the purposes that Zimmerman undertook as the focus of her work is to "present a methodology that ... proposes that a study of liturgy by way of its textual form not only gives an explanation of the sense of meaning of a text but also gives a reference of meaning as an understanding of Christian existence which the texts seeks to celebrate."<sup>8</sup> She chose Ricoeur because "Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics is known as a textual or methodical hermeneutics whereby he is able to address the question of text and the relation of written texts to human cultural existence."<sup>9</sup> By applying Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics, Zimmerman hopes to demonstrate a method of going beyond the liturgical text and its contents into the realm of the actual contemporary existence of the participants.

Zimmerman's concern is not mainly with interpreting the liturgical text itself, but the process of communication between the texts and the participants of liturgy. What she offers is not a method to find the one and true meaning that is hidden within the liturgical text which implies a certain ability to comprehend it.<sup>10</sup> Rather, she wants to reconfigure the contact between the narrative of liturgical texts and the real experiences of the participants. According to Zimmerman, the recovery of meaning within a text should also be made within this context. The recovery of meaning is urgent precisely because the contact of a reader and a written text has much less direct reference to its author when a reader reads it,

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8 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. xiii.

9 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. xiii.

10 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 24: "... the aim of liturgical language is to engage the community in a celebration rather than to produce an esoteric text that only the 'select' can appreciate. Liturgical language does not belong to the private domain of the clergy, but necessarily derives from the faith experiences of a tradition of community celebrations."

compared to the contact between a speaker and a hearer, which presupposes ostensive reference.<sup>11</sup>

Within the realm of oral speech, the recovery of meaning happens when discourse is constructed by utterances of a communication process. According to Ricoeur, the recovery of meaning from text as a written discourse, must pay attention to the analysis of its whole structure.<sup>12</sup> This is because text is a work that purposely conforms to a certain structure that will induce a certain logic of meaning, categorized according to the rule of the literary genre, and inhibits the style of its author. However, these three components of written text (composition, literary genre, and style) do not demand the readers to have a better knowledge of the author's intention to recover the meaning of the text. The readers of a text do not share the same life situation as the author; therefore, they have to recognize the possibility of references to understand the meaning of the written text better.

Zimmerman emphasizes Ricoeur's notion of the dialectic of explanation and understanding. The meaning of a written text can be recovered by using structural analysis to uncover its linguistic structure. However, this moment of interpretation can only bring the linguistic meaning of a text that is built through the composition of written sentences and paragraphs according to a certain rule of a literary genre and style.<sup>13</sup> It can

11 Zimmerman, referring to Ricoeur's work "Speaking and Writing" in *Interpretation Theory* (1979, pp. 34-35), mentions: "In oral discourse, reference is ostensive; that is, it is a known, shared reference arising from the shared dialogical situation of the interlocutors. An ostensive reference can be further detected through indicators such as demonstratives, adverbs of time and place, verb tenses, and definite descriptions." (*Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 67)

12 Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 13: "Interpretation, ... is the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning." For further reference, please see also Ricoeur's later works such as *Time and Narratives*.

13 Zimmerman, referring to Ricoeur's work "Speaking and Writing" in *Interpretation Theory* (1979, p. 32), mentions *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 65: "These three components of composition, literary genre, and style bring text from a macro-structure (composition) level to a micro-structure (stylistic) level. The literary genre mediates these general and particular levels. There is an organization and purposefulness about text that distinguishes it from simple discourse. As a work of production, a text displays a

only *explain* the sense inherent within the structure. However, there is another moment, which seeks the sense outside the structural language. Ricoeur calls it understanding, which is based on the readers' empirical knowledge of existence.

Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics tries to bring the dialectic of both explanation and understanding to recover the meaning of a written text.<sup>14</sup> With explanation, a way of existing for a being, which consists of signs of self-existence, is structured into a text that can be analyzed and exposed using linguistics, structuralism, or the philosophy of language. The exposed reality of existence is then verified through juxtaposing it with the readers' understanding. This dialectical process of interpreting text results in a deeper understanding of one's existence.

There are three movements in interpretation or recovery of meaning from a written text. We approached the text with our understanding of existence. Then, we expose the signs of existence within the text by explaining them scientifically. Lastly, we confront the former understanding of the exposed explanation to come to a deeper self-understanding of our own existence. Ricoeur refers to this progression as guess, validation, and appropriation movements.<sup>15</sup>

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structure that is constitutive of its meaning. This is a critical juncture for hermeneutics. To change that structure is to change the meaning. To uncover that structure is to uncover the meaning."

14 Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press: 1991), p. 130: "Exteriorization in material marks and inscription in the *codes* of discourse make not only possible *but necessary* the mediation of understanding by explanation, of which structural analysis constitutes the most remarkable realization."

15 Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 74-75: "For the sake of a didactic exposition of the dialectic of explanation and understanding, as phases of a unique process, I propose to describe this dialectic first as a move from understanding to explaining and then as a move from explanation to comprehension. The first time, understanding will be a naive grasping of the meaning of the text as a whole. The second time, comprehension will be sophisticated mode of understanding, supported by explanatory procedures. In the beginning, understanding is a guess. At the end, it satisfies the concept of appropriation, ... Explanation, then, will appear as the mediation between two stages of understanding."

It is our pre-understanding that invites us to guess the meaning of the text as a whole because of the lack of shared reference. Since it is only a guess, that is why a validation process is needed. Within this process, a guess is validated as a possible meaning by way of placing it with other possibilities and with the configuration of the signs of existence constructed within the text itself. Here, the readers will find the opening of a 'world' which serves as the reference of meaning for the text. Only when the readers embrace one meaning as their own guidance to direct their existence afterwards, will the appropriation take place.

Textual hermeneutics, then, is an activity of the reader that attempts to fulfil three objectives, namely participation, distanciation, and appropriation.<sup>16</sup> The pre-understanding that we bring when we engage in a text is also meant to make the author's work a part of our human existence. The reader tries to grasp the whole as belonging to one world of human experience.<sup>17</sup> The communication of traditions from the part of the reader and from the part of the author is being anticipated here. When the readers are getting into the work, while bringing together their anticipation of the communicated tradition, they are forced to *step back* from their own tradition to achieve an objective sense of what the author is trying to communicate through the structure of the text.

This moment of distanciation makes possible the reading of the author's tradition from the point of view of the reader's tradition.<sup>18</sup> There-

16 Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, p. 38 on footnote no. 47: "These interpretive moments are not to be taken as temporally sequential; they all three stand in dialectical relationship to each other."

17 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, pp. 78-79: "Ricoeur is not perpetrating his own brand of determinism here. He is simply asserting that a text is a human mediation of the objectification of the signs of self-existence. Text advances our participation in life from interiorization to exteriorization. Human mediation permits a projection outside of self as works of the artist, legislator, educator; that is, as texts. Our point is, these objectifications of human existence derive from our participation in human existence. Some originary human experience or event gives rise to any text. This originary experience or event is never lost to a text because participation ensures a certain 'readability' to the extent that readers share a common 'belonging-to,' a common tradition." For a more detailed reference please see Ricoeur's "Explanation and Understanding" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (1978, p. 165).

18 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 81: "In distancing the text from the situa-

fore, during the moments of appropriation, what the readers chooses as their own meaning is the actual result of distanciation. During appropriation, the reader adapts the objective meaning of a text into the reader's subjective point of view, while realizing also the possibility of other readings of meaning such as one proposed by the author, inhibited in the structure of the text. The readers' awareness of this objective meaning of the text that the readers experience through distanciation, signals an awareness of different possibilities of reading.<sup>19</sup> A new self-understanding emerges when the readers embrace this world of possibilities while at the same time commit themselves to one reading of meaning.<sup>20</sup>

The other effect of this new self-understanding is that the readers also realize the critique they make to their own old self. Textual hermeneutics will result, eventually, in the transformation of self to a new mode of existence for the readers. The text, in the end, will not only result in the delivery of a new reading of meaning, but also its embodiment in the new

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tion of its writer, the text enjoys an autonomy which allows it to be present to the situation of the reader. This autonomy privileges the text with a diversity of meaning to be recovered in the hermeneutical process. Though the 'text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author,' it is rescued by the numerous horizons lived by its author," it is rescued by the numerous horizons of its infinite number of possible readers. ... Distanciation allows the meaning of a text to traverse the historical situation of the writer to the historical situation of the reader, lending a new proximity to the text." For further clarification about distanciation, please refer to Ricoeur's "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981, p. 131).

- 19 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 83: "[A]ppropriation is the subjective counterpart of the objectification (distanciation) characteristic of the work. The subjective response proper to appropriation is not a response to the author, but rather it is a response to the text. ... the vis-à-vis of appropriation is the reference, the world of the text. This world of the text is not *behind* the text, tied in with the intention of the author, but it is imbedded in the depth-meaning of the text ... Appropriation concerns the way a text addresses a reader. The act of reading actualizes appropriation." Please refer also to Ricoeur's "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981, p. 143).
- 20 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 85: "... the understanding which is the moment of appropriation is the result of the interpreter's way of existing being challenged by the possibilities opened up by the reference of the text and validated in the explanatory moment. In the moment of appropriation, the new possibilities that are made our own actually lead to a change in the self; hence, a new self-understanding is a new mode of existing." For further clarification please refer to Ricoeur's "Appendix: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language" in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (1977, p. 319).



self of the one who reads it. Zimmerman calls this embodiment of the text to the self as a “celebrative (playful) transposition of the text.”<sup>21</sup>

When the readers realize the world of possibility thrown in front of them from the text, and they embrace it by choosing one reading of meaning to direct their being, the readers transform the text into a living world of possibilities of being. The readers might choose only one possibility of reading, but by doing so they expose this world of possibilities to their own being, a world that is always ready to be expanded even more when the readers include it as their pre-understanding in reading another text.

### **RICOEURIAN TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS IN LITURGICAL CONTEXT**

Zimmerman goes further by applying this textual hermeneutics to the reading of liturgical text. With every liturgical text come liturgical experiences and traditions with the church as the background of its religious language.<sup>22</sup> In applying textual hermeneutics to liturgical text, the three moments of participation, distanciation, and appropriation are working in a similar pattern.

What we bring as our pre-understanding to encounter a liturgical text is that it has the transcendence foundation as its motive. Its inscription into a text is a symbolization based on a faith experience. As such, we come to realize that we can guess its meaning only through referring it to our own symbolization of faith experience. The liturgical text is mediated by symbols to convey the faith experience it contains. We also realize that this liturgical text we are about to encounter is the result of a long process of actualizing a faith tradition. By entering it, the past and the future are united in the present of us as its readers.

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21 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 86.

22 Ricoeur's notion of religious language can be found in Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 61: “[R]eligious language ... uses limit-expressions only to open up our very experience, to make it explode in the direction of experiences that themselves are limit-experiences.”

Once we are encountering the liturgical text itself, we will meet the linguistic symbolism of faith experience. Distanciation happens when we realize that these linguistic symbols are what make the text a Christian text and not a mere random text of any author. We will realize the distance we have with the Christian tradition that delivered the text. Even though, as Christians, we realize the different era, the different kind of experiences that sedimented in the text. However, this distance does not force us to abandon the text. Rather, this distance invites us to reflect upon our own tradition of faith experience.

The meaning of liturgical texts is now throwing in front of us an invitation to enliven that meaning in our own faith experience. When we answer this invitation from the text, we appropriate it as ours. We try to harmonize it with our past existence and redirect it according to this newly found meaning of our faith experience. This way, the three moments of textual hermeneutics supports the embodiment of transformative dimensions of liturgical texts. Zimmerman emphasizes that textual hermeneutic approach to liturgical texts is one which must view the text as more than just a mere document. Liturgical text must be treated as a testimony for celebration of Christian life. Therefore, to encounter them is to encounter the lives which celebrate Christian faith.<sup>23</sup>

Following Ricoeur, Zimmerman also makes use of Jakobson communication theory.<sup>24</sup> The role of Jakobson theory is to complement the explanation side of Ricoeur's textual hermeneutic which is the knowing of the meaning inhabited in the structure of the text. Because liturgical text is a dialogical text, uncovering its dialogical dimension to unveil its'

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23 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 91: "In all of this, liturgy as a *celebration* is emphasized; that is, liturgy is not merely a cultic occasion, but derives from and affects human activity beyond the parameters of those occasions. Thus, the study of liturgical texts from the perspective of textual hermeneutics is not the study of dead documents, but rather the interpretation of documents of Christian life. A study of liturgical text is really an encounter with Christian life. In its deepest sense, liturgy is a language of faith."

24 Zimmerman's source of Jakobson's communication theory is from Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics." in *Style In Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960).

active character is a necessary step. Through his communication theory, Jakobson conveys six elements of communicative actions. They are the addresser, the addressee, contact, code, message, and context.<sup>25</sup>

Using Ricoeur's textual hermeneutic and Jakobson's communication theory, Zimmerman analyzes the liturgical text of the Eucharist<sup>26</sup> from the text of *Missale Romanum*. Based on the explanatory mode of textual hermeneutic, her analysis of the text of the Eucharistic liturgy results in the recognition of a four-fold structure of communication from the four parts of Eucharist. These are Contact (from Introductory Rites), Message (from Liturgy of the Word), Context (from Liturgy of the Eucharist) and Code (from Concluding Rite).

The Introductory Rites are structured as Contact because all of its components run a phatic function that aims to make the community realize that God is the one who gathers them and that their communication is addressed to God.<sup>27</sup> The Liturgy of the Word is structured as Message because the readings, the responses, and the homiletic exposition contain the poetic functions.<sup>28</sup> With these functions the whole reference of the readings (the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the present life)

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25 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 105: "There is more to Jakobson's communication theory than identifying these six factors that make up a communication act. To these six factors, Jakobson parallels six communication functions (how the factor affects the meaning of communication)."

26 By 'Eucharist,' I refer to the Roman Catholic Mass. I will use the words 'liturgy of the Eucharist' when I am referring to the part of the Mass that includes from the moments of offertory until the communion.

27 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 143: "The strongest evidence for the phatic set of the Introductory Rites is contained in the initial gathering of the ministers and the greeting and introduction by the presider. Other linguistic indications throughout the Rites support and sustain a configuration of the Introductory Rites toward a phatic function while the subsets specify the nature of the contact set."

28 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 150: "The focus on the readings, and especially the Gospel, indicates message as the communication set of the Liturgy of the Word. Two major subsets, contact and code, lend it an action character: the contact before and after the readings unites the community with the proclamation and the codes make public the community's assent. The metalingual subset is especially important in relation to the poetic function of the whole division. In fact, we might distinguish two different exercises of the metalingual subset. As characterizing the responsorial Psalm and Gospel Acclamation, code is an affirmation of a composite message."

is brought into the process of communication. The promise made in the Old Testament was renewed in the New Testament and is being fulfilled in the present life. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is structured as Context because its three parts (Preparation, Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion Rite) are directed toward the embodiment of all the references from the Liturgy of the Word.<sup>29</sup> This embodiment enlivens the remembrance of the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

The whole context of the Eucharist is the reality of human salvation through Christ's death and resurrection. Without this embodiment, all the references of the Eucharist would be abstract references. Through the remembrance action that the congregation enacts in this part, the whole references of the Eucharist become a living reality. This is affirmed in the last part of the Eucharist, the Concluding Rite. This rite is structured as Code because its components serve a metalingual function that is directed to make an affirmation to the congregation about the commitment of faith they embodied through the preceding Eucharistic parts.<sup>30</sup>

The hermeneutics of the Eucharistic text provides an explanation of the structure of the liturgical text. The explanation of the structure of Eucharistic communication reveals that it is not governed only by prayer genre, although it includes prayer as part of each structure. A prayer

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29 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 161: "The concomitant action develops around the community (addresser), especially in terms of offering gifts and eating and drinking. The action, however, is focused by the context (remembering the deeds of salvation) of the eucharistic prayer. This framing of the referential function between two emotive functions structurally demonstrates the Eucharistic prayer as the central part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist around which the action is organized. As such, the action itself is to be interpreted within the referential thrust of the eucharistic prayer. The communication set of the Liturgy of the Eucharist as a whole is toward context."

30 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 164: "the entire communication thrust of the Concluding Rite redounds to the community (initial contact, blessing, and their affirmation) but its real import is community affirmation. The metalingual function of this division, moreover, is not an affirmation of something that takes place within the division, but rather of the whole action that has preceded it and follows it. This suggests that the eucharistic rite is not an eclectic conflation of disparate elements but that the various elements are organized in such a way as to lead somewhere: to the final metalingual response even though each division has its own unique sense to contribute to the meaning of the whole. ... The communication set of the Concluding Rite is toward code."

genre structure basically connotes the addresser (human) in the performative (the supplicant) and the addressee (God) as the performer (the grantor). The Eucharistic text reveals more than just a prayer genre. Zimmerman also mentioned that it is also more than just a narrative genre. Because even though narrative is included, the rite itself “does not have a definitive end point from which we can read the story ‘backwards’.”<sup>31</sup> Rather, the Contact-Message-Context-Code structure of communication reveals a genre that ends not with of conclusion but a beginning, a sending to mission.

Zimmerman concludes that “the genre which generates liturgical texts must at least be able to incorporate varied forms of discourse (such as prayer and narration) and configure the action toward our notion of a sense of beginning.”<sup>32</sup> Despite the inability to name the specific genre of this liturgical text, we shall agree with Zimmerman that the analysis of the Eucharistic text gives us an urge to go beyond all literary genres. We need to understand that all the references of the Eucharistic text are real and that we are now invited to enliven the reality of these references. Hence, we now move from the boundary of explanation to the boundary of understanding.

What happens during the moment of understanding of this world of liturgical text? Zimmerman concludes this last step of her textual hermeneutics by applying Ricoeur’s moment of appropriation. It is a moment “by which we insert our Christian existence into the larger world of praxis (informed by the distanciation) as required by ‘reading’ the text.”<sup>33</sup> Hence, Zimmerman locates this process of appropriation during the moment of the actual celebration when the participant is responding to the liturgical text being read.<sup>34</sup>

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31 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 169.

32 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 170.

33 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 173.

34 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, pp. 90-91: “Texts finds its completion in the act of reading, the liturgical texts also find its completion in liturgical celebration. The arc between participation and appropriation is mediated by the celebration of the liturgical text. If liturgical celebration does not call forth appropriation, then the mediat-

It is during the involvement of the participants' responses with their whole existence during Eucharist that the whole process of entering the world of the text is initiated.<sup>35</sup> The process of communication that takes place during the liturgical celebration between God and the participants plays an important part to facilitate the appropriation of meaning. Thus, it is not so much about the dynamic actions of the participants to "answer" God during this celebration which counts. Appropriation of meaning results from the participants' engagement to the ritual enactments.

The appropriation of meaning by entering the new world thrown by the text does not mean the end of the liturgical celebration. What the participants experience during the liturgical celebration is an appropriation of self-understanding. It is the moment of commitment to refigure the self according to a new self-understanding. The moment of appropriation initiated at this moment will be embodied in the daily experience of the assembly. Zimmerman connects the process of textual hermeneutics of the liturgical text with the ethical transformation of everyone in the assembly. She emphasizes the importance of the refiguration of "the self-in-community"<sup>36</sup> by way of praxis.

Each person within the assembly is now invoked to appropriate their new self-understanding practically. Zimmerman regards the use of language within liturgical text not as the employment of empty language or merely the rhetorical use of language. Instead, it is the use of existential language. Since liturgy starts from the language of our existence, the reading of liturgy implies an invocation to the experiential dimension of life.<sup>37</sup>

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ing role of the liturgical text is not complete. Only when the text mediates its two sides can liturgy be said to be a complete act."

35 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 190: "The way in which liturgy is appropriated depends more on the community than on the text. In fact, without an assembly, liturgy does not happen."

36 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 194.

37 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 195: "... the moment of appropriation of Christian liturgy implicates the political, economic, social, and ethical dimensions of human living. This is what is meant by our statement that 'living in' a liturgical text must give way to 'thinking from'. The latter is not just a cognitive activity, but a way of

## REVIEWING ZIMMERMAN'S APPLICATION OF RICOEUR'S TEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

Zimmerman's application of Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics in reading liturgical texts is indeed a contribution not only to the development of Ricoeur's hermeneutics but also to the methodology for liturgical theology. Her efforts revealed that Ricoeur's hermeneutics is not directed at finding the correct meaning of a text, rather, about living the self through text. It is about semantics of understanding considering that "understanding itself is an action".<sup>38</sup> Methodically applying Jakobson communication theory as a method to understand the explanatory pole of hermeneutical process, her analysis proves that Ricoeur's hermeneutical method is not an end in itself. It serves as a means that needs to be put into dialogue with other methods to sustain its dialectical character. The same effort is done also with other fields of theology, such as Biblical Theology by scholars such as Sandra Schneiders.<sup>39</sup>

More importantly, Zimmerman's application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics manages to transform the dialogical process of liturgy into a "threshold" for the participant subject to answer the revelation of God.<sup>40</sup> Dialogue is no longer a mere process of returning to the subjectivity of the

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living Christian praxis that witnesses to the unity of the religious and practical spheres of life."

38 Nathan G. Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology: Economy and Reality* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 91.

39 Sandra Schneiders included in her hermeneutic another method such as feminist criticism. See for example her introduction of her interpretation on the story of the Samaritan women in *The Revelatory Text Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*: "The goal of the interpretive process is not merely exegetical-critical but properly hermeneutical. In other words, I do not propose simply to discover what the text says about the Samaritan woman in relation to Jesus in the context of the first century ... in order to extrinsically 'apply' the results to current feminist concerns. I am interested in the truth claims intrinsic to the text as they are addressed to believing readers in relation to their discipleship. The aim is to allow the world of Christian discipleship as it is projected by this text to emerge and invite the transformative participation of the reader." Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2016), p. 181.

40 Byung-Chul Han recognizes the importance of liturgical events as thresholds when he states, "Thresholds speak. Thresholds transform. Beyond a threshold, there is what is other, what is foreign." Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), p. 35.

participants by understanding themselves in front of the text. It becomes revelatory encounter of both the two parts of the dialogue: God and participants.

On one hand, the revelation of God's work in humankind becomes incarnated in human's experience. On the other, the answer from the participants to this call from God manifests the "spiritual understanding" of being in this world.<sup>41</sup> By enabling this process, Zimmerman manages to answer the challenge of postmodernism to religion and to elevate it to another level. Liturgy, by way of hermeneutics, does not only include a multiplicity of meaningful relations. It also transforms these relations into one that is characterized as an answer to God's call through being with others as God's creation.

I would like to pose a few questions for Zimmerman's application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. First, following the critique of Zimmerman by Michael B. Aune, we could question the counter effect that readers could encounter when they use Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics. Would there not also be recognition within the language of the Eucharist of a language of power of the hierarchy or gender bias that would lead to an undesired kind of transformation?<sup>42</sup> How can we direct it to the proper spiritual understanding of our existence as willed by God?

Second, can we limit God's work only within the confine of the text? Liturgical celebration is dynamically sustained through its texts. But it is also beyond them. Its call to make a connection with the mystery of God's work, as Nathan Mitchell sees it, is built not only through its text but also

41 By 'spiritual understanding', I am referring to Goffredo Boselli's connotation of the term when he related it to liturgy. He states, "It is an essential element of the church's transmission of the true meaning of the liturgy, because it is above all a spiritual understanding of the liturgy that makes transmission of its authentic meaning possible." Goffredo Boselli, *The Spiritual Meaning of Liturgy: School of Prayer, Source of Life*, trans. Barry Huddock (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), p. 19.

42 Michael B. Aune, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 58, no. 4 (Winter, 1990), p. 734: "... it is clear that the purportedly communal and relational language of contemporary liturgical celebration is not always perceived and appropriated as such. The manner and setting in which this language is voiced still evokes all too often present power and hierarchical arrangements and relational alignments that are contradictory of the Christian message."



through the meeting event of celebrating the mystery of God.<sup>43</sup> Does not this meeting event with the mystery itself should become the primary source for manifesting spiritual understanding of the participants?

Third, concerning the meaning and reference of a text, Ricoeur believes that reference can be reached through the specific use of language which relates a text to a particular world of experience. Following John B. Thompson, it is unclear how we can verify that a certain meaning of a text (the 'what is said') really refers to a particular reference (the background for 'what is being talked about').<sup>44</sup> We need to verify this so that we can confirm the guess we make with our pre-understanding. Otherwise, our first attempt at guessing will remain as a guess and we will be left in confusion in front of multiplicity of world of meanings. Not that it is necessary for it to change (the new readings can also *affirm* or enhance our first pre-understanding). But unless we can be sure about *this* particular reference (among others) as *the* reference for the meaning, we will always be in danger of staying under the illusion that our first guess is the right one. Especially in the religious language of liturgical text, which presumes a very personal kind of experience, what kind of experience or whose experience will be the guiding light for a meaning to relate to a particular reference? The difficulty in making that leap from meaning of the text to the reference of the text is there because of our need to open ourselves for another possibility of meaning.

Fourth, when does this moment of textual hermeneutics take place during liturgical celebration? Ricoeur applies his method of textual hermeneutics during a moment of reading a text as discourse by a reader, in contrast to the moment of discourse of speech. The difference is, during a speech discourse there is a direct sharing of reference that makes the

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43 Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, p. 59: "Yet my central contention in this chapter is that the purpose of liturgical rites is not to "produce meanings." Liturgy's goal isn't meaning but meeting."

44 Werner G. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, trans. Thomas J. Wilson (New York: Crossroad, 2005), p. 60: "Yet Ricoeur does not clarify the nature of this contextual dependence, nor does he specify the sort of circumstances that are to be regarded as relevant in assessing the success or failure of a referential claim."

interlocutors know what each other is discussing (or they could directly confirm it to each other, when confusion appears). This share of reference is lacking during textual hermeneutics which makes the possibility of the world of meaning (regardless of the author's intention) appear. In the context of liturgical celebration, it is the presider, the psalmist, or the lector who reads the text for the assembly. Are these not moments of speech rather than reading? Does Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics also apply to those moments when we listen to other people read a text for us?

I am intrigued in how Zimmerman's application of Ricoeur's textual hermeneutic can be contextualized for different situations of interpretation. A hermeneutic process applied by a single person to an ordinary text through a process of interpretive reading seems to be quite different in terms of its hermeneutic situation from the one done by an assembly through a process of *hearing* the presider, the lector, or the psalmist reading (or singing) the liturgical text (or parts of it) to them. From what I understood, Zimmerman's method depends on the dialectical relations inherited in Ricoeur's hermeneutics that makes the moment of reading (the moment of sense and explanation) is not in temporal sequential relationship with the moment of appropriation (the moment of reference and understanding).<sup>45</sup> Therefore, there seems to be a kind of leap from text to action that is presumed here.

However, since Ricoeurian hermeneutics is meant for the written text; without ever neglecting the semantics of action it inherits, can we apply it to the situation when a person reads for the assembly? How can

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45 Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 19-20: "To mean is what the speaker does. But it is also what the sentence does. The utterance meaning—in the sense of the propositional content—is the 'objective' side of this meaning. The utterer's meaning—in the threefold sense of the self-reference of the sentence, the illocutionary dimension of the speech act, and the intention of recognition by the hearer—is the 'subjective' side of the meaning. ... the 'objective' side of discourse itself may be taken in two different ways. We may mean the 'what' of discourse or the 'about what' of discourse. The 'what' of the discourse is its 'sense,' the 'about what' is its 'reference.' ... the sense correlates the identification function and the predicative function within the sentence, and the reference relates language to the world. ... the dialectic of sense and reference is so original that it can be taken as an independent guideline. Only this dialectic says something about the relation between language and the ontological condition of being in the world."

this leap from text to action in the reader effects the listener in the context of dialogue? This leads also to the question of our loyalty to the text: how far can the presiders include their own initiative about reading the liturgical texts they use? Must they rely to the text faithfully to the rubrics? And if so, would this not lead into a kind of rubricism?

Lastly, there is also a question about the appropriation by the reader. When the new self-understanding emerges from the explanation of the text, how can this lead to an appropriation by the reader? Confronted with the fact that readers have the freedom to choose their own commitment, how can Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics guarantee that the whole process will trigger a transformative process of the assembly. There has been a long debate about the relationship between liturgy and ethics which questions how liturgy, with all its dynamics, can be a source of inspiration for the ethical life of the assembly.

Participants of liturgy can enjoy good liturgy, being inspired and invoked to a certain commitment, but at the same time limiting this 'trance' moment only to the liturgical celebration. Borrowing the words from Werner G. Jeanrond, "the act of reading demands to be thought out more precisely from both poles: namely from that of the requirements of the text postulating its re-creation and also from that of the desire of the reader for a renewal of his/her self."<sup>46</sup> Thomas Scirghi re-warned this danger more in a liturgical context: "...while we profess that all things are possible with almighty God, we must recognize as well our ability, in freedom, to deny the divine gift of God's grace. While the gift is offered, human beings may choose to either accept it or reject it."<sup>47</sup> Zimmerman does seem to recognize this danger.<sup>48</sup> But her silence on this matter probably reveals a demand to acknowledge also the mysterious work of God in the liturgy.

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46 Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, p. 61.

47 Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi, *Living Beauty: the Art of Liturgy* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2008), p. 144.

48 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 194: "... if the celebration of the liturgy does not culminate in appropriation, then liturgy's language of faith is relegated to mere words spoken and actions undertaken during a cultic occasion."

## COMPLEMENTARY TO RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS AS METHOD FOR LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

To acknowledge the various decentering movements in liturgy is especially needed in the postmodern context.<sup>49</sup> Thus, one of the main challenges of postmodernism to liturgy is to include multiplicity of meanings in its application. Zimmerman has shown that Ricoeurian hermeneutics can be of help in this matter. What needs to complement this method, however, are three things. They are, namely: to broaden its use not only for written text, to include a postmodern sacramental theology in its view, and to base it on postmodern view of ritual that will help expand the *explanation* moment of the dialectic it possesses. Therefore, the assembly will still have the same access to the structure of the ritual itself and not only to its texts.

First, Ricoeurian hermeneutics is not limited only to textual hermeneutics. His understanding of text is more extensive than just written text. In "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text", Paul Ricoeur clearly mentions, "... like a text, human action is an open work."<sup>50</sup> Further, Ricoeur explains that human action, like text, are waiting to be interpreted by its "readers".<sup>51</sup> Based on this, we can apply the same process of Ricoeur's hermeneutics to the structure of gestures that occurs during liturgy. This will make the hermeneutical analysis of liturgical text become much richer. To this end, further research into the application of Ricoeur's hermeneutics to the structure of liturgical gestures is needed.

49 Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in A Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 60: "The Christian churches are now decentered in almost every society, though the variety of forms this shift of social position takes is considerable."

50 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 155.

51 Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 155: "It is because it 'opens up' new references and receives fresh relevance from them, that human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretations that decide their meaning. All significant events and deeds are, in this way, opened to this kind of practical interpretation through present *praxis*. Human action, too, is opened to anybody who can *read*. In the same way that the meaning of an event is the sense of its forthcoming interpretations, the interpretation by contemporaries has no particular privilege in this process."

Second, since the target assembly for our liturgy is the assembly of postmodern culture, it is always better to have at the base of this hermeneutics the same kind of sacramental theology and ritual understanding in postmodern context. Regarding postmodern sacramental theology, Kenan B. Osborne stated that there has been a change in the nature of sacramental theology.<sup>52</sup> He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the notion of dialectical self through the response of the participants, for the sacramental event to become actualized.<sup>53</sup> This shift of the nature of sacramental theology has an effect on ritual, the very face of the sacraments. Osborne notes that, "In sacramental *Haecceitas* there is a need not only to ritualize in celebration what God does for us, but the very response to this wondrous self-revelation of a compassionate God must be a response with life-activating and ethical dimensions."<sup>54</sup> The consequence of this postmodern sacramental theology is that liturgy in its essence will not only consist of symbols of God but also needs to be in balance with the symbols of human dialectical responses to the call of God.

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52 Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 195: "In my view, the basis of sacramental theology itself—that sacraments are foundationally and primordially actions of God and only secondarily human responses—moves the universal claim to divine dimension. The human dimension, then, remains subjective, individual, temporal, and linguistic. In the human dimensions these same issues cannot be avoided; they must be faced honestly. In other words, universality in a primordial and foundational way belongs only to God, and in the dual action of sacramentality in which God reveals God's own self to a human person there can only be temporal, subjective, linguistically particularized *Haecceitas* or individuality. ... In most theological discourse on sacraments, the *Haecceitas*, the *ipséité*, is not even taken into account, or if it is, it is seen in some form of *opus operantis*. ... To speak only of sacramental 'sames,' *mêmeté*, is to miss the reality that involves the 'selves,' *ipséité*."

53 Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*, p. 197: "Since there is a dual dimension to sacramentality—the unique revelatory event of God and the secondary response of human individuals—a sacramental event only takes place when this secondary response occurs. The human response is intrinsically temporal, intrinsically limited, intrinsically subjective, and intrinsically *ipséité*. The return to the subject is not simply a return to human nature, which is only a return to the "same." Rather, the return to subjectivity is a return to the 'self.' Between the 'same' and the 'self' there is identity and difference, but it is in the dialectical relation of the self to the other that *ipséité* finds meaning."

54 Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*, p. 165.

Within the dialectical situation of our existence, liturgy needs to make us feel the promise of the triumph that awaits us besides urging us with the call to transformative conversion. What the symbols need to convey is, in the words of Nathan Mitchell, "the fundamental fact of Christian experience."<sup>55</sup> The symbols of liturgy should reveal not the coercion of power to conversion, but an awareness of the logic of being a Christian in a way so that those who experience the symbol will find the sense of mystery in its truth. And the truth is that, amidst our own inconsistencies, the cross, the surrendering of oneself, the obedience to God's will as human is our only way as Christians to experience resurrection with Christ.

God's hiddenness during Christ's passion *is* the condition for Christ to make sense out of his incarnation and to make his resurrection a victorious event. *This* is the paradigm that provides the logic for our existence as Christians in this world and appeals for our "appreciation of the limits of reason" so that "mystery returned in different ways".<sup>56</sup> The consent that we give to this mystery, because we feel the truth of the dialectic between triumph and the discomfort it induces, is what enables us to freely affirm our commitment to the transformative conversion. To be able to convey and to bring the postmodern Christians to the acceptance of the truth of this dialectic, the truth of our paradoxical Christian existence, what kind of character should our liturgical symbols reflect?

First, Mitchell argues that liturgical symbols must help liturgy to reveal its nature as 'meeting' instead of 'producing meaning'.<sup>57</sup> Mitchell argues that what happens during liturgical rites is that process of being a person by modeling the life of the Trinitarian persons, who themselves personify each other by the relationship that is characterized by mutual self-surrender. Therefore, when we enter liturgy, we enter this rela-

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<sup>55</sup> Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> Ivana Noble, "Mystery and Worship" in *Theological Foundations of Worship Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Khalia J. Williams and Mark A. Lamport (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2021), p. 158.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, p. 59: "Yet my central contention in this chapter is that the purpose of liturgical rites is *not* to 'produce meanings.' Liturgy's goal isn't meaning but *meeting*."

tionship of *personae* who are constantly surrendering to each other. This means, as we enter, we are also gaining our personhood through letting go of ourselves. When we enter the relationship that already makes us meaningful as a person, it is no longer meaning that we seek.

The second trait of liturgical symbols is that it must be able to express also the experience of faith as an experience of loss, an experience of absence besides presence. What the meeting in ritual brings is an experience of “meeting that ends in loss and dispossession.”<sup>58</sup> Learning from the paschal experiences of the disciples of Jesus, who all experienced the risen Christ that ends with losing him again, with the fact that they cannot own him. Mitchell argues that this ‘presence of absence’ should be differentiated from the ‘absence of presence’. It does not mean negating the presence, that everything is non-existent. It means that the presence of God is there, but the presence is by way of not revealing.<sup>59</sup>

## CONCLUDING FOR FURTHER PROSPECT OF HERMENEUTICS IN LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

Zimmerman believes that Ricoeur’s textual hermeneutics is only one method of doing liturgical theology.<sup>60</sup> The strength of Ricoeur, according to Zimmerman is that its “explanatory moment allows for different methods, so hermeneutics has a built-in suspicion.”<sup>61</sup> Her intent is to throw into the field of liturgical theology a method of hermeneutics that can be used as an alternative for liturgical theology. Indeed, she has proved it useful. Especially in recognizing that the transformative dimension of the liturgy lies in the building of the new self-understanding in its connection with “self-in-community-in-Christ.”<sup>62</sup> This is very postmodern. Howev-

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58 Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, p. 63.

59 Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery*, p. 67: “God reveals by concealing and conceals by revealing.”

60 Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, p. 8: “Our intent is not to promote a single hermeneutical approach as the “right one” but, instead, to point out advantages and disadvantages for a number of hermeneutical approaches.”

61 Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, p. 38.

62 Zimmerman, *Liturgy as Language of Faith*, p. 195.

er, Ricoeur's theory, I think, is not to be used only by itself. Zimmerman also recognizes that hermeneutics for liturgy should be combined with methods from other fields.<sup>63</sup> The room for dialogue with other methods in Ricoeur's theory is what makes it a useful tool to answer the signs of times.

Mitchell's view of rituals is one possibility for complementing Ricoeur's hermeneutic. Mitchell's understanding of liturgy can be applied to the postmodern era because it gives the room for the multiplicity of meanings and relations. With Mitchell's addition of viewing liturgy as an event of real dialogue with the mystery of God, the possibility of Ricoeur's hermeneutics a method of postmodern liturgy is widened. After acquiring the framework discussed in this paper, entering the dialogue with other fields of research which deal with other 'events' of liturgy is ever more encouraged. Liturgical Theology needs to become a theology which facilitates the process of incarnating God's grace and transforming the spiritual experience of a particular culture in a particular era.

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63 Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, p. 85: "Much of the post-critical work in liturgical studies has been more in the line of borrowing theories and aspects of methods rather than a wholesale, rigorous use of specific methods."



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