A lecture at the annual meeting of LEITOURGIA

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Every foreign country a homeland; every homeland a foreign country: on liturgy and culture [i]

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for asking me to join you once again at the annual meeting of Leitourgia. My memory of meeting with you in Sigtuna, when you gathered for the second time in 2006 under the leadership of Karl-Gunnar Ellverson, is still fresh in my mind and dear to me — and now it is lovely to have that memory extended by seeing you again here in Reykjavik. And I want to thank you also, as a brother from afar, for the work you each do in the North, both in liturgical study and in care for liturgical renewal in the churches.

In what follows, I would like to think with you about the issues involved when liturgy and culture are in dialogue. To achieve that end I would like to do four things: 1. remind you of the ecumenical work on this theme done in the 1990's under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation and tell you of a continuing trajectory from that work, represented by a volume published just last year; 2. share with you a part of that book that I have written myself; 3. briefly describe some fascinating results from a recent historical study of the medieval dialogue between liturgical architecture and culture in Germany and Scandinavia; and 4. gather these three things together into one possible agenda for ongoing work on liturgy and culture now.

1.

In 1993, under the leadership of Anita Stauffer, the Lutheran World Federation convened, in Cartigny, Switzerland, a study team to discuss the dialogue of worship and culture in the life

of the churches. The team consisted of 15-20 members, coming from LWF member churches from around the world, together with several ecumenical participants from Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican and Disciples of Christ churches. The Scandinavian participants were Nils-Henrik Nilsson and Helena Tallius Myhrman from Sweden and Øystein Bjørdal from Norway. I was myself a member of the team and, together with Anscar Chupungco of the Philippines, one of its two regular resource persons. The team met four times: in Cartigny in 1993, in Hong Kong in 1994, in Nairobi in 1996, and in Chicago in 1998. It produced three volumes of essays, papers originally presented at the meetings of the team, and three formal Statements. Of those Statements, the one that has drawn the most ecumenical attention and been the most widely discussed was surely the 1996 "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," with its four-fold discussion of Christian worship as *transcultural*, *contextual*, *counter-cultural*, and *cross-cultural*. The studies in these volumes and the Statements were published originally in English but then also translated and distributed in German, Spanish and French. After some time, however — perhaps due to the tragic illness and death of Pastor Stauffer but also due to other budgeting priorities in Geneva — the volumes themselves became increasingly more difficult to find.

Still, international discussion — especially discussion of the Nairobi Statement — did continue. The four-fold schema of that Statement became standard in discussions of the topic. Its conclusions were compared to the insights of the Second Vatican Council. And some historians thought the Study itself one of the most important things the LWF had ever done. Nonetheless, the Study and its Statements did not go without critique: Among other matters, questions were raised as to whether the LWF Study's conception of "culture" was too static; whether cultural "hybridity" and post-colonial cultures were sufficiently considered; whether the "transcul-

tural" elements of worship did not also have a specific cultural origin; and whether the "shape" or *ordo* of worship could really be regarded as universal, as Nairobi seemed to suggest.

Given this continuing discussion and given the difficulty of anyone procuring copies of the original volumes, a new effort was called for. Starting in 2009, the Brazilian Presbyterian pastor and theologian, Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, began to gather a series of essays and other texts, from ecumenical and world-wide sources, that continued the discussion of the issues involved with the LWF Study. Interleaving those essays and texts with a few of the essays from the original volumes, with all three of the original Statements, and with a fine bibliography, Pastor Vasconcelos then published the new book, *Worship and Culture: Foreign Country or Homeland*. I recommend this new book to you. It is the LWF Study continued, in a broader ecumenical context and with some brilliant new essays — those of Stephen Burns on *ordo*, Anita Monro on baptismal identity, and Benjamin Stewart on what we mean by "culture," for example — essays that engage the limitations of the Nairobi Statement and yet extend that Statement's usefulness for us now. And it is the best way now to have access to those LWF Statements.

2.

My own principal contribution to the book was an essay from which both this present lecture and this new book have drawn their titles. Let me give to you a little of that essay.

Among the many early expressions of Christian thought that have come down to us, I judge that one interesting, incisive voice might be especially important to hear when we are considering cultural diversity and cultural relevance in Christian liturgical practice. The voice is that of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, a second or third century writing that has been preserved to us in only one thirteenth or fourteenth century manuscript. We know very little about the provenance of the writing or of the writer, but we can recognize in the work, nonetheless, a particular voice

expressing clearly the faith and practice that was becoming orthodox, faithful Christianity in the early centuries.

The passage from the *Diognetus* — from its fifth chapter — that might address us here is this:

> Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they do not dwell off somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor do they practice an extraordinary style of life . . . But while they dwell in the cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the local customs, both in clothing and food and the rest of life, the constitution of their citizenship is nevertheless quite amazing and admittedly paradoxical. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign country is a homeland to them, and every homeland is a foreign country.[ii]

The writer then continues with several examples of the cultural correspondences and the cultural differences of Christians, among them these:

> They marry as do all people and have offspring, but they do not expose their children. They set out an hospitable, open table but not an open bed.[iii]

"Every foreign country a homeland and every homeland a foreign country." Notice: not "heaven is my home" but "every foreign country." Note also: not simply "resident aliens," but "aliens who are at home here." It is a remarkable vision, one that can be especially helpful to us now, affirming both human cultural rootedness and something larger than such rootedness and inviting Christians to find themselves in sympathy with — even "at home" in — every culture, at the same time that they also need to exercise a certain criticism of every culture. Perhaps, in-

deed, we can be drawn to this old voice precisely because of our own world-wide cultural moment, the conversation and argument not only among Christians, but among everybody in our own current cities: How do we treasure difference and yet find common values? How does specific cultural identity not simply become the source of violence and exclusion? How do the universal patterns of global consumerism not rob us of the ancient wisdom of local cultures? How do we avoid both cultural imperialism and ethical relativism? And how do we avoid simply giving up in despair, regarding the only defensible value to be found in the private choices of the individual consuming self? And why do these questions matter so much?

"Every foreign country a homeland and every homeland a foreign country." Especially in that first phrase, this is an idea not unlike the ancient proposal of the Greek Cynics — and then of the Roman Stoics: they called themselves "cosmopolitans," a proposal that was itself a metaphor straining into a paradox.[iv] In ancient Greek thought and practice, "politans" (to make up an English word from the Greek *polites*) are *citizens*, city-dwellers, this-city-people, the free and responsible participants in the "political" life of a city, a *polis*, one city against the others. The cosmos — the whole universe seen as an ordered whole — is not a city. But the astonishing proposal of these "cosmopolitans" — a philosophical proposal sometimes seen as useful by later Christians — was that the wise man or woman should be such a citizen, such a locally invested and responsibility-bearing participant, of the *universe*.

Of course, caring about the universe can easily lead to caring about no particular, local place at all, dismissing and undermining difference. So it is that more recent cosmopolitan thinkers — like the remarkable Kwame Anthony Appiah — have called themselves "partial cosmopolitans"[v] and have sought both to support some basic universal values and to celebrate local difference. One of the most interesting ancient assertions of this view, struggling toward

both local particularity and more-than-local value, was that of the second century B.C.E. Roman playwright Terence in his famous dictum *homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto* — "I am a human being: nothing that is human is alien to me."[vi]

Christians can and should rejoice in this line of Terence. Indeed, I think that Christians can and should find themselves allied with the partial cosmopolitans, over against all imperialists (on the one hand) and all identity purists (on the other). Just so, I think that Christians today should delight in and learn from any stories of people who become "amphibians," capable of swimming and walking in more than one culture. Such amphibians, by the way, are not just the educated elite or the traders and merchants or the world tourists: they are more especially the immigrants and refugees found everywhere today, or the country-folk who have come to the city for economic reasons, or the city-folk who have sought refuge in the countryside, or the First Nation folk — as they are called in Canada — who simply by being alive in current Canada or the United States are living mixed cultural lives, balancing values, learning new ways. The amphibians are often *us*. And the "cultures" that are so mixed are not simply ethnicities but all the ways people specifically teach their children to order and navigate the world, all the locally specific languages, symbols and habits we use to organize human life. For a Christian intentionally to join these amphibians, to find "every foreign country a homeland," to treasure other cultures — in whatever way is possible, bit by particular bit — and to learn more and more of them — indeed, to seek to hold more than one idea about how to live at one time: this is not easy. But it is the invitation held out by the writer of the *Diognetus*. Even more, I think, Christians should join in the growing, post-colonialist acknowledgment that cultures themselves are always mixed, "mongrel" even, changing, an internal argument — hybrid, impure, intermingled things, to quote

Salman Rushdie[vii] — and that we all are living in and even enjoying the fruits of many cultures. You and I, dear friends, are inevitably living such lives right now.

But in Terence, in his play *The Self-Tormentor*, that phrase occurs in a comedy, as a comic justification for gossip — *gossip*, that wonderful, painful, busy-body investigator of all things human! Accused of being a gossip, his protagonist says, "I am a human being! Nothing that is human is alien to me!" We laugh with Terence, see the truth in the laughter, but we also know that in Christian use, the same idea is anchored in theology itself. And that theology is anchored in the biblical stories. God has made all things, all people. All people, all nations, from all times are invited to gather before God with their gifts. "People will bring into that city the glory and honor of the nations" says the vision at the end of the Bible (Rev. 21:26). "Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol God, all you peoples," says the Psalm.[viii] I am part of that *all*. Still, for Christians, there is more: all things are in need of God, all human beings are in utter need of grace. I am also part of *that* all. "But nothing unclean will enter it . . .," says the same Revelation text (21:27). "In Adam's fall, we sinned all," says the old Christian sampler phrase, sewn into her hand-work by many a nineteenth century Anglo-American girl who as yet knew very little of the global cultures embraced by that "all" (except, perhaps, what she knew of the tea she was learning to drink in china tea-cups, brought to her shores by sailing ships). Nothing that is human — the great gifts and the great need, the beauty and the sin — is alien to me.

That assertion of universal gifted-ness and universal need is one reason why the Gnostic idea is such a *bad* idea: God did not really make the world, according to that idea. And humanity is divided up between the really large group of fleshly people who do not get it and the tiny group of spiritual people who do. For such an idea, most of what is human is indeed alien to me,

if I am one of the enlightened, and I am destined to get out of here, away from all these fleshly diversities, escaping into the pure, unmixed Idea of the utterly spiritual One.

But orthodox Christians have not needed Gnosticism to fuel their rejection of the other. Think of the "Catholic Monarchs" in Spain and think of their Inquisition in its relationship to Muslims and to Jews. Or, in North America, think of the Puritan colonizers of New England in their relationship to the peoples of the land, peoples of the forest, a relationship that became an oft-repeated and murderous pattern in North America. Or, in northern Europe, think of Boniface chopping down that oak tree and Charlemagne similarly destroying the Yggdrasil-like *Irminsul* and the kings of the North compelling baptism by the sword. The melancholy stories still go on. Indeed, unless one uses the biblical idea of an "elect people," a people "on the hill," giving light to the world, very, very carefully, it can carry within itself the uncriticized idea that *we* are the elect and that *our* current culture is God's own approved, superior culture.

No. *Every foreign country a homeland and every homeland a foreign country*. It is a paradox and it is surely nearly impossible actually to live out, but it is a better, more *biblical* idea than either the Gnostic proposal or the uncriticized use of an idea of "the elect." It is an idea more in accord with the deep story of Israel — of Israel as a separate priestly people only to exercise that priesthood for the sake of the life of all peoples (Ex. 19:5-6) — and more in accord with the account of Jesus in the four Gospels, the four diverse, flesh-honoring, gospels. In those Gospels, for example, is found both the Lukan use of the originally Hellenistic cultural idea of "benefaction," reworking that cultural idea as a mark of Christianity,[ix] and the Johannine prayer, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in your truth . . ." (John 17:15-17). Indeed, many Christians down through the ages have tried to live by

both of these ideas, finding diverse ways to bring to expression both their "being at home" and their being sojourners, suffering and criticizing the institutions of local culture.

How might we do that?

I have argued that the ecumenical liturgical renewal movement has within itself, if we pay attention, the seeds of a lively and helpful, biblically-rooted balance between being at home in every culture and being a stranger. The renewed *liturgy* can be one source of wisdom for us in the current, urgent questions of cultural identity and multi-cultural encounter. But how so?

In fact, this idea is profoundly helpful as a hermeneutical key in approaching the history of Christian worship. For one thing, Christians, from the beginning, have struggled with a balance between the local and the universal in their worship. That balance of the local and universal, the contextual and the transcultural, is a particularly liturgical way of enacting the saying of *Diognetus*. The local assembly is church. So is the world-wide assembly, the hoped-for communion of all the assemblies. When they are healthy, the celebrations of Christians are always local — they are *translated,* making use of local languages, local people, local food and water, local architecture, local patterns of gathering with others, local cultural matters — but they are also always in touch with others away from here, strange to this culture. Indeed, Christian assemblies receive their ministers as sent by the others, read their scriptures and confess their faith together with the others who are not here, in more-than-local patterns. When gestures toward the universal came to dominate — as in the late-medieval imposition of an idealized Roman practice everywhere in western Europe — the liturgy could quickly become impenetrable and unhelpful to local assemblies, and much in need of reform. As you know, such imposition can and does occur again and still. But, similarly, when the liturgy became too local, un-corrected by the more-than-local communion, it could finally wander away from the Christian faith itself, as in

the communities that became Gnostic or Manichaean. Such local distortion also still occurs, accentuating only local identity, losing catholic connection. In any case, liturgy in the vernacular and liturgy as responsible, participating, local assembly are continuing monuments from this assertion: every foreign country a homeland. And the Bible itself, that collection of books from other cultural times, read with authority in our midst — not to mention a widely shared lectionary or the creeds or the patterns of ministry or the very *ordo* of the liturgy — these are monuments from this assertion: every homeland a foreign country.

Furthermore, it was a *liturgical* judgment that Tertullian made when he said that "whatever belongs to those that are of us, belongs to us."[x] Being at home in other cultures may be hard, but liturgical customs spread, nonetheless, cross-culturally inviting us into at least a fragment of multiculturalism. Local practice becomes a cultural mix. The assembly practices of the Christians assimilate and are assimilated to local cultural patterns, and the resulting mix — often because of its very brilliance — can then be adopted much more widely, with growing meanings. So, today, in the renewed liturgy, we keep a revised version of the ancient Asian Christian reworking of the Jewish Passover to become our Pascha or Easter, the ancient Roman (and then especially the northern European!) Christian reworking of the pagan Winter Solstice or Jul now become our Christmas. Nothing is more traditional among faithful Christians, says Anscar Chupungco, than the constant inculturation of the liturgy, including the resultant spread of the creative assimilations.[xi] Somebody started to anoint the newly baptized or clothe them with a clean, white garment. Somebody began to light candles at evening prayer or light a fire at Pascha. Somebody — probably someone here in the North! — started to use an Advent wreath or a Christmas tree. The original stories are complex, partly hidden, but they involved cultural practices, cultural translations. And they have spread nearly everywhere.

The very most central matters of Christian liturgy, the matters that centrally bear the gospel of Jesus Christ — the scriptures that are read and preached, the meal that is celebrated, the bath with which the community is constituted, and the very idea of assembly itself — are themselves old cultural artifacts, most of them from specific Hellenistic-Jewish (note: mixed!) cultural moments not our own.[xii] And even though these central matters are stylized, made to connect with the basically human transcultural realities of assembling, bathing, story-telling and meal-keeping and so to connect profoundly with us as well as with other peoples in other places and times, this Bath, Word, Table and Assembly trail something of that foreign country with themselves, training us to be at home in every foreign place. More: these very material, central things of Christian worship, wherever they are celebrated — if the celebration allows these things to stand forth in clarity and strength — are always straining to make use of local water, local agriculture, local speech, and thus they are inviting us all to treasure every foreign eco-system, every foreign local culture, re-learning the ways in which culture itself is at its best when it is solidly connected to the land and to communities passing on to their children the most helpful ways they have found to live in the land.

Indeed, for Christians, the deepest ground for this "being at home" in every foreign land comes not from cosmopolitan insight but from the gift of that central Christian Bath. At least according to current attempts at understanding this gift, the baptismal Bath itself washes us into identification not just with our own local group, but with Jesus Christ, who in his death and resurrection identifies with all people, especially in their great need.[xiii] To be baptized, then, is not to be distinguished from humanity but, paradoxically, to be identified with the one who identifies with all. For Christians, it is Jesus Christ the crucified who is the "elect one" — and in him an "elect community" must be with him and like him. For Christians, paradoxically, "election,"

being a chosen one of the insiders, has an utterly new meaning: in Christ, we are to be at home in every foreign land. Such being at home does not come easily, but it is our vocation. In this sense, "you are a chosen race, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty deeds" of *this* God (1 Peter 2:9).

All very well, you may say. At least when it was renewed, Christian liturgy classically welcomed and affirmed diverse cultures, symbolizing the open gates of the city of God and inviting Christians who are in communion with each other to find every foreign country to be a homeland. But what about the other side of the saying? What about "every homeland a foreign country"? What about the critique of cultures?

A certain critique of cultures also belongs to the ecumenical liturgical renewal, but it is harder to articulate — perhaps hardest of all about one's own cultural patterns. The very fact the Christian liturgy is made up of a variety of diverse cultural materials is already some help. Fierce, uncriticized local identity, resisting and rejecting all others, is harder when some of the most important things in our lives — hymns in which we sing our faith, for example, not to mention the patterns and central matters of the holy communion itself — come at least partly in forms that we did not make up and that do not come from here.

Even more, the very scriptures read at the heart of our meetings are themselves not a uniform, cultural whole. They are a kind of canonical argument — Job with Deuteronomy, for example, or Ruth with Ezra and Nehemiah, or Mark with Matthew, or Paul with James — a way to let two or more conflicting ideas about "identity" be held at once in the very center of our assemblies. Where such mutually critical sacred scriptures are read — and where they are *heard* — it will be harder to establish only one cultural way.

Again, the most central matters of our liturgy — Bath and Word, Prayers and Table, to use one summary list — can demonstrate ways that culture is not only welcomed and celebrated but criticized. These central matters are made up of local, ordinary cultural materials from daily life — story-telling and meals, of course, but then also appeals to the divine and baths to mark a new beginning. But these matters are now used in critical and re-orienting association with Jesus: with his reversals of religious meaning and his attack on religious boundaries, with his death and the communal practice of his resurrection. In many cultures, local words ordinarily tell local stories with conventional endings in which people get what they deserve. But in the four Gospels and in liturgy that is faithfully in continuity with them, traditional stories are given surprising, mercy-filled endings. The disfigured child is not thrown away. The curse becomes a place of blessing. Communal meals are a universally local cultural phenomenon, in which our small group assures itself of its own survival and passes on its own culture — but only for our group. But in the four Gospels and the letters of Paul — and in the liturgies that keep the Lord's supper in company with them — commensality with Jesus is combined with an open door to the outsider and the sending of food to the poor. This cultural criticism belongs to the heart of Christianity, to the very continued proclamation and discernment of the crucified and risen body of Christ. Furthermore, in need, prayers arise from practically every set of local lips, to anything that might be regarded as being able to help – for *us* and for *ours*. There are richly diverse cultural forms for such prayer throughout the world. But in the four Gospels and in the reformed liturgy, the community is invited to pray for *others* beyond this ordered circle, others beside itself, to pray for the earth itself, and thus to pray in Jesus' name. And, as we have seen, even water and its local cultural uses gets re-oriented in healthy Christian practice to mark not so much purity and distance from the unclean as participation in the need of all the world. This is the bath, as I have

tried to say, that makes us dirtier. The word and the sacraments at the heart of Christian worship are ordinary, human cultural matters, criticized and re-used to bear the gospel of Jesus Christ, thereby giving us an image of God criticizing and saving our cultures. Every homeland a foreign country.

These proposals from reformed Christian liturgy are not themselves the full answer to the current, worldwide cultural quandary. But they are a pattern, a symbol, an important model, a gift to our need, a balance to our frequent imbalance.

3.

Something of this story, something of Christian liturgy in critical yet affirming dialogue with local culture, of homeland as foreign country and foreign country as homeland, can also be told of the history of Christianity in the Nordic lands. I have recently been reading a remarkable book that I think you ought to know. The book, written by Fr. Ronald Murphy of Georgetown University and the Society of Jesus, is called *Tree of Salvation: Yggdrasil and the Cross of the North*.[xiv] Recalling the ancient Nordic myth that told of a great tree — a mythic evergreen ash — that has held the universe together, Murphy finds stunning evidences for the use of images from that myth in Christian liturgical practice in northern Europe.

Being northern Europeans, you may well know the outlines of this myth better than I. Here in Iceland, only a little ways away from the Árni Magnússon Institute where the most important manuscripts are cared for, you may recall — perhaps from school! — some of the details of this myth, details that are especially preserved in the Elder Edda and in Snorri's Prose Edda. So, the great tree held all in communication and order, connecting the dwelling place of the gods with the Middle Earth of the humans and with the roots on which the great Nidhogg serpent gnawed away, while consuming the bodies of the dead and preparing for Ragnarok when every-

thing, including the gods, would be destroyed. So, the tree itself provided food for the animals — for serpents entwined about it, for deer nibbling at its bark — while suffering in the feeding. So, at the foot of the tree the gods had an assembly place, and the Norns, the Fates, wove the thread of time there, all the while splashing water and mud onto the tree to renew its life. And on this very tree, Odin had hung and suffered — riding the tree as if it were his horse, *Yggdrasil*, the Awesome Steed — thereby winning the runes, written on twigs from the tree, which he gave to humankind for the making of powerful words.

Most of all, Murphy recalls a feature of the myth which is found both in the Elder Edda, in the *Vaftthrudnir Mål,* and in the *Gylfaginning* in Snorri's Edda. When the destruction of all things comes, *Lif* and *Lifthrasir* — "Life" and "Desire for Life" — who are the only remaining two human beings, a girl and a boy, find refuge *inside* Yggdrasil itself, *in the tree*, where they are fed and bathed with dew from the pool and leaves from the tree and from where they will be re-born to a new beginning of all things, to all things made new.

Here is Murphy's proposal: the great tradition of Christianity in the North was not finally a tradition that sprung only from Boniface's or Charlemagne's axe. Many Christians knew how to set out the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that its meaning would be clear and its mysteries inviting by using images already known and important in the North. The foreign country of Nordic myth, a country inhabited by many people, could become a homeland for Christian faith. Thus, the eleventh and twelfth century stave churches of Norway could be seen as the inviting presence of the tree in which humankind could take refuge, as if in the interior of Yggdrasil, because of the tree of the cross on which Jesus Christ, not Odin, hung. This Jesus Christ is not still dead, with Odin, but alive, and the runes he gives are the gospel-word, the *godspel* of God's forgiveness and grace. Imagine the famous Borgund church, for example, its many wooden roofs

towering up in the shape of an evergreen tree, wrapped with serpents as was Yggdrasil. Or imagine the old entrance to the Urnes church in Sognefjord, where the door really does appear as if one is entering — with Lif and Lifthrasir — into the trunk. Just as the Judgment was often pictured at the door of Romanesque church buildings in France or Spain, so Ragnarok is imagined here. Death and destruction are all around us. Here in this place, this church building, is refuge for life and for a new beginning.

Or think of the famous round churches of Bornholm in Denmark. The great supporting central pillar in all four of these churches, built at about the same time as the stave churches in Norway, makes it clear that the congregation is gathering under the tree. Indeed, in one church — the Østerlarskirke — the pillar itself is hollowed out. If Murphy is right, the baptismal font would have been at the foot of this pillar and communion would have been given in the hollow space, under the pillar itself. Here the assembly gathers in the holy space where the ancient assembly of the gods took place. Here the assembly is washed in the dew from the pool of the Fates and fed from the tree. Only now, what is here is Christ's offer of rescue-in-the-tree, in the cross, Christ's pool, Christ's food, as a downpayment on the renewal of all things.

I find this ancient speaking of the gospel in northern terms to be very moving. These are not the mythic terms of my own culture, but the very excellence of this translation has made a thing, a cross-cultural gift, that profoundly draws me and that enriches us all. As with all authentic contextualization, the meaning of the gospel itself is seen to be broader and deeper than we had thought. And this liturgical architecture is not confined to the stave churches of Norway and the round churches of Denmark. In Finland, for example, interior wall painting from the late fifteenth century in the church buildings at Lohja and at Hattula has covered the entire interior of the church with vines and tree-branches and leaves that grow from Christ on the Jesse Tree and

are filled with images of Jesus' life and death and resurrection and images of the saints. Also in Finland, the congregation took life-giving refuge in the tree.

What did the assembly *do* in their tree-refuge/church? While the stave churches in Sweden have mostly disappeared, one medieval textile from Skog in Hälsingland, preserved in Historiska Museet in Stockholm, shows the assembly inside a stave church, at mass. The entire assembly raises their hands in *orans* posture. The priest points to the chalice and rings a bell. Larger bells are rung by participants inside and outside the building. Christ giving himself away in the central things provides the life-giving center, at the heart of this amazing work of cultural translation.

And what of "every homeland a foreign country?" What of the critique of local cultures? From the remarkable remains of this liturgical artwork, we do not know of the content of sermons — of the reworking of old, dark ideas of Fate, for example — nor of the lived-out rejection of Nordic class-systems and Nordic slavery and Nordic violence. But, in the Skog tapestry, all the assembly stands together as one, as baptism has made them, and — at the far left — Odin with his one eye and a little tree, Thor with his hammer, and Freya with her signs of fertility walk peacefully away. They will die at last, though they are not here being killed. Meanwhile, all of creation runs toward the church and its sign of new life.

4.

So what shall we do with this, in our own liturgical communities? How shall every foreign country be for us a homeland and every homeland a foreign country still as we go to church?

I wish I could urge you to build tree-churches again, where the water-bath and the holy communion and the gospel-runes might be enacted in the holy assembly under and within the

tree. But I am quite aware that this mythic world is no longer quite your culture and that you cannot be kept romantically captive in that culture any more. We can nonetheless learn a great deal from these historic examples.

What can we do? Here are four concluding proposals. For more — and there are more — I urge you to read Pastor Vasconcelos's book.

1. Read and think about the Nairobi Statement. Or, at least, think about its major point: Christian worship is marked by a transcultural, contextual, cross-cultural and counter-cultural relationship to every culture. All four. Gathered around a few transcultural central things — important to us because of their association with Jesus as well as their long centrality in Christian practice — Christian liturgy seeks to arrive in every cultural place, welcoming local and distant, contextual and cross-cultural gifts into its hybrid practice while it also seeks to resist the dangerous — sometimes the *murderous* — practices of local cultures, including especially their practices of identity purity.

2. Continue to work on the clarity and largeness of the central matters — Bath, Word, Prayer, Table, and participating Assembly — as truly the center of your gathering, and learn from *them* about Christianity and culture: Basic human cultural materials — meals and story-telling, for example — are the very heart of Christian worship, teaching us to love these same things in every foreign country. Yet these very things are broken to the purposes of Jesus and his Spirit, welcoming outsiders and the unclean, teaching us to be strangers in every too-delimited homeland. Set out the central things as *now*, in your real context, the very city where the gifts of the nations — your own cultural gifts — are brought, welcomed, pruned, reoriented, and healed.

3. Continue to welcome many new gifts to come to this assembly. Continue to write on the palimpsest of cultures that is our Sunday assembly. Let change and a centered mixture —

word and sacrament with a hybrid music and mixed genres, the familiar holy eucharist done in a new way — characterize us.

4. As you work on continuing translation, continuing contextualization in our time, seek to use cultural images as important as Lif and Lifthrasir finding refuge in the tree and ask what gods of ours — perhaps our nationalisms, our war-plans, our money, our success, or simply our own selves — need to walk away. Indeed, think about how mass and baptism as celebrated in your wonderful historic tree-churches, while the gods walk away, already image this work: Every foreign country a homeland; every homeland a foreign country.

Gordon W. Lathrop

Notes

[i] Parts of this paper appeared in the volume *Worship and Culture: Foreign Country or Homeland,* Gláucia Vasconcelos Wilkey, ed., (GrandRapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 10-25.

[ii] *Epistle to Diognetus* 5:1-5. The translation is my own. The Greek text can be found in Kirsopp Lake, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* II (Cambridge,Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), 358, 360.

[iii] *Diognetus*, 5:6-7.

[iv] See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), xiv.

[v] *Cosmopolitanism*, xvii.

[vi] Quoted in *Cosmopolitanism*, 111-112.

[vii] Quoted in *Cosmopolitanism*, 112.

[viii] Psalm 117:1. See the Psalter in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

[ix] See my *The Four Gospels on Sunday* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 117.

[x] Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 2:2. See also my *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 119ff.

[xi] See Anscar Chupungco, *The Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist, 1982). On "creative assimilation," see also his "Two Methods of Liturgical Inculturation," in S. Anita Stauffer, ed., *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1996), 78-81, and the *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture* 3.4.

[xii] On baptism and eucharist as Christian re-workings of cultural artifacts, see the articles in S. Anita Stauffer, ed., *Worship and Culture in Dialogue* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 17-102. Some of those articles were themselves re-worked, with additional attention to *assembly* and the observance of *time*, in chapters 7-9 of my *Holy People*.

[xiii] See the *Chicago Statement on Worship and Culture*, 2.3. See also "Baptismal *Ordo* and Rites of Passage in the Church," in S. Anita Stauffer, ed., *Baptism, Rites of Passage and Culture* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1998), 34-35.

[xiv] G. Ronald Murphy, *Tree of Salvation: Yggdrasil and the Cross of the North* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).