

**Terence Cuneo. *Ritualized Faith: Essays on the Philosophy of Liturgy*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$90.00 (hbk).**

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*Ritualized Faith* is a collection of Terence Cuneo's essays in the philosophy of liturgy, a topic which has been largely neglected by philosophers of religion. By focusing on questions of belief and largely ignoring the role of worship, Cuneo writes, much of the discussion in contemporary philosophy of religion is detached from the religious life. Philosophy of liturgy, he suggests, addresses issues concerning religious life as it is lived 'on the ground' (4).

The fundamental question that is posed by reflection on liturgical practice is that of what liturgy is and what it is for—the question of what we are we doing when we participate in liturgy, and why. Once we no longer regard liturgy as a mechanism for pleasing the gods in order to secure material benefits or to avert disaster in this world and the next, the question is pressing. Cuneo dismisses the view that dominates his own Eastern Orthodox tradition according to which it is a means of rising from the material to the spiritual, from the sensual to the noumenal, as a vestige of the 'neo-Platonic philosophical framework' which he notes most contemporary philosophers find alien. Instead, he holds that 'liturgical worship presents the world as a manifestation of God and God's activity to which we, in worship, respond in thanks' (3).

That, according to Cuneo, is why we do liturgy. As to what it is we do, he introduces a vocabulary and conceptual framework to characterize liturgy as such. Liturgy is scripted. A liturgy is an *action-sequence universal*, which may be performed on multiple occasions by a variety of assemblies, for which the roles of participants, the actions they perform, and the props with which they engage, are designated by a script. In this respect, liturgy is like the allographic arts—like music, dance, and theater, in particular: art forms which are scripted and performed. Liturgies assign roles to participants in liturgical service, designate actions associated with each role, provide instructions for the use of props, and specify what is to be said and done, when and by whom. Unlike ordinary art forms, however, liturgy is a vehicle through which participants perform religiously significant acts. In acting liturgical scripts, participants perform illocutionary acts which 'alter their normative position with regard to God and fellow members of the assembly with whom they perform these actions' (13).

Given this account of the what and why of liturgy in his introduction, Cuneo addresses a number of issues concerning the role of liturgy in the essays that follow, ending with an autobiographical sketch. Some of the essays elaborate on the account of what liturgy is and what it does sketched in the introduction. Some touch on topics that are mainstream in the philosophical literature, including the role of liturgy in the moral life and the problem of

God's hiddenness; others are concerned primarily with liturgy as such and its theological import, focusing on the practices of Eastern Orthodox churches.

The first essays in this volume are reflections on the moral import of liturgy. In 'Love and Liturgy', quoting extensively from the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom, Cuneo argues that the liturgies of the Eastern Christian tradition express an 'ethic of outwardness' which enjoins us to attend to the needs of others including those who belong to various outgroups as distinct from an 'ethic of proximity', according to which we are to attend to the needs of those near and dear. In 'Protesting Evil' Cuneo argues, perhaps less plausibly, that a close reading of the Gospel account of the feeding of the five thousand and the Eucharistic celebration in which it is cited symbolically address evil by pronouncing 'a No to evil' (41).

'Another Look at Divine Hiddenness' which follows is a response to J. L. Schellenberg's case for religious skepticism given God's hiddenness. Divine hiddenness poses a problem for theists. Assuming that awareness of God is a good thing, indeed, according to many theists the best thing, it is hard to understand how an omnipotent God could permit individuals who are capable of a meaningful conscious relationship with him to lack that awareness—as many do. To this, Cuneo responds that they *don't*: even individuals who are unaware of God as such may be aware of God and rightly related to him 'via relating to the natural world, to each other, to art and the like without having awareness of this type' (16). Well, yeah. So say the spiritual-but-not-religious and followers of Abu Ben Adhem, protagonist of Leigh Hunt's poem, whose name appeared first in the list of those who loved the Lord because he loved his fellow men. Most Christians however hold that a meaningful, conscious awareness of God as such is better than an awareness of God through his works that fails the consciousness requirement. Here we see through a glass darkly—there face to face. And the suggestion is that there is better than here. Cuneo responds that God's veiled self-revelation is at the very least 'admirable' and that he may have good reasons for choosing to remain, at least temporarily, anonymous. He compares God's program to the policy of a human benefactor who, with the best interests of her client in mind chooses to remain anonymous for a time while 'pursuing in a patient and resourceful way, a more intimate relationship' (60).

'Liturgical Immersion', 'Liturgy and the Moral Life', and 'Ritual Knowledge' are perhaps the most interesting essays in *Ritualized Faith* since they are studies in philosophy of liturgy as such, elaborating on the account of what liturgy is and does sketched in the introduction. Cuneo discusses and critiques Anamnestic and Dramatic Representation theories of liturgy in favor of his own Immersion model. Citing examples from Orthodox liturgy, he argues that liturgy is a non-fictive reenactment of (allegedly) historical events in which participants assume 'target roles', acting the parts of individuals who figure in the historical stories 'with the purpose of *being that way*, becoming like or identifying with that which one imitates' (79). Such reenactment, he argues, is not pretense but rather a matter of taking up the vantage point of the character with whom one identifies for the purpose of immersing oneself in the narrative itself (86).

Like a serious engagement with literature, Cuneo writes, liturgical reenactment can make important contributions to the moral and religious life. Liturgical scripts call for 'indexical appropriation', immersing oneself in liturgical action by entering into target roles which, he suggests, may expand and refine our powers of moral understanding. Nevertheless, unlike reading a novel, which may be morally transformative, liturgical reenactment calls for commitment, indeed, commitment in community: participants in a liturgical service are aware that the liturgical script they perform calls their fellow

participants to commit themselves to the very ideals to which it calls them to commit themselves (105). Such participation, Cuneo suggests, is a way of knowing—a kind of *knowing how*, which cannot be understood as a species of *knowing that*. In ‘Ritual Knowledge’, he argues that knowing how to perform liturgical rites of various sorts contributes to knowing God (146).

In additional essays, Cuneo reflects on liturgical practices as they figure in the Eastern Orthodox Church: the veneration of icons, liturgical singing, the rite of baptism and rites of remission. He concludes with an autobiographical essay, describing his journey to the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Cuneo’s discussion of liturgy throughout this collection of essays focuses exclusively on liturgies of the Orthodox tradition. ‘The best way to make progress on the topic of liturgy’, he writes, ‘is to speak not of liturgies in the abstract but particular liturgies, offering thick descriptions of them and drawing out their implications’ (17). Orthodoxy is Cuneo’s home and Orthodoxy liturgy is exceptionally rich: having become increasingly complex and elaborate through accretion over the centuries. His focus on Orthodox liturgy is, however, a mixed blessing. Because Orthodox liturgy was never radically revised, regimented, or overhauled, as liturgies of the West were during the Reformation, Counterreformation, and the past century’s ‘purges’,<sup>1</sup> it has generated very little critical reflection. Accordingly, Cuneo takes the liturgy of the Orthodox Church, which he quotes extensively in most essays, as a given: the data for philosophy of liturgy, exemplifying liturgy and displaying what it does.

In the West, at least since the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the 16th century, liturgy has not been taken as a given, but as a body of texts and practices subject to critique and improvement. Protestant Reformers translated liturgical texts and radically revised liturgy; Catholic reformers regimented liturgy, canonizing the Tridentine Roman Rite and suppressing local practices. The Liturgical Movement began in the 19th century as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church devoted to the reform of worship. During the 20th century liturgical churches in the West, both Protestant and Catholic, influenced by the Liturgical Movement, overhauled their liturgies. In the service of this program of liturgical revision, liturgists working within Protestant and Catholic churches produced an extensive literature, including historical scholarship and work that addressed questions concerning the nature and purpose of liturgy. Cuneo ignores this body of literature which, insofar as it has driven liturgical revision in Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches, has had import for religious life as it is lived ‘on the ground’ by most Christians in the West.

Cuneo touches only briefly on the significant differences in the way Eastern and Western churches have understood liturgy in ‘If These Walls Could Only Speak’, his reflection on the veneration of icons in the Orthodox Church. In the Christian West, he notes, religious images have traditionally been understood as ‘the Bible of the poor’ following the dictum of Pope Gregory the Great: ‘what writing presents to readers, a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read’ (107). Similarly, in the West, and especially in the Protestant West, liturgy was assumed to have a didactic purpose. Luther wrote hymns as vehicles for conveying

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Day, in *Why Catholics Can’t Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste* (Crossroad Classic, 1992), is responsible for the term which accurately reflects that trashing of the Church’s musical tradition in the aftermath of Vatican II as seen and experienced by Day, a church musician.

Reformation doctrine—following, perhaps, the example of Arius who composed theological ditties to promote his views. During the latter part of the 20th century, when the Roman Catholic Church revised its liturgy and other ‘liturgical churches’ followed suit, it was in part the didactic role of liturgy that drove liturgical revision. The Roman Catholic Church abandoned Latin in favor of local vernaculars and the Episcopal Church recast Prayer Book services in contemporary English in order to make liturgy a more effective teaching tool. The East, as Cuneo notes, understood the role of icons differently—‘not primarily as pictorial texts for the illiterate, but [as] quasi-sacramental mediators of divine presence’ (108). And, as Cuneo’s reflections suggest, the East understood liturgy differently—not as a vehicle for conveying theological information or moral exhortation but as a corporate action in which participants, through the non-fictive reenactment of historical events, engage with the divine presence. Arguably, it is time for the West to recover that tradition—as liturgists within Western churches, engaging with Eastern sources, recognize.

The Reformation gave ordinary people opportunities for intellectual engagement in much the way that synagogues provided places where ordinary Jews and gentile fellow travelers, locked out of the philosophical schools which catered to the elite, could study and learn. For ordinary people in early modern Europe confined to the small world of the village and its environs, where schooling was the prerogative of the elite and books were scarce, Protestant churches provided teaching, opportunities to learn, and openings to a wider world through preaching and the Bible in the vernacular, which even a plowboy could read in his own language. Nowadays, at least in the Global North, schooling is available to all, literacy is the norm, books are cheap and plentiful, the internet is ubiquitous, and the synagogic function of churches is less important. Affluent, educated people get information and opportunities for intellectual engagement from secular sources and, increasingly, have no use for churches. Most view ‘organized religion’ as didactic and authoritarian, an institution whose purpose is the enforcement of rules and exercise of social control. Those who have an interest in ‘spirituality’ would never dream of looking for it in a church. Others, like Cuneo, have found their way to liturgical churches, which offer more than preaching, teaching, ‘community’, or opportunities for social action, and social service.

The liturgical churches of the West, like the Orthodox Church, have a treasure that the world cannot provide of which secular people are unaware. It is to be hoped that in the future Cuneo and others concerned with philosophy of liturgy will address the questions posed by the ongoing discussion of liturgy within Catholic and Protestant churches of the West and in their dialogue with Eastern Orthodox churches.