

PROXIMITY

Methodology in Liturgical Theology

This article introduces proximity theory; a direct-access means to analyze live liturgical events with both ease and rigour. As context, it also examines limits of text-based analysis applied to a liturgical event. It discusses paradigms underpinning the text-based approach. Then it proposes paradigm shifts that arise out of using the proximity methodology, and briefly demonstrates six applications.

Proposing a New Methodology for Liturgical Event Analysis

We are proposing a new, easy-to-use methodology to analyze live liturgical events.¹ The methodology consists of the reiteration of two simple² questions: how close are things, and how are things close? The methodology is direct, robust, omni-dimensional and accommodates all sensible³ liturgical data.

By easy to use, we mean that the person in the pew, as well as the scholar, may call upon this approach.

By direct, we mean that it may be applied without any specific measuring devices, hermeneutic tools, or specialized language⁴ commonly used within such disciplines as semiotics, structural analysis, psychology, etc. Instead, this direct methodology relies on a person witnessing the live

1. This article presents the key components of our dissertation, *How Close Is God? How Is God Close?*, available here: <http://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/en/handle/10393/23822>.

2. The reader is invited to distinguish between simple and simplistic, noting that the simple binary of 0 and 1, reiterated, runs all of modern society.

3. Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) 7, Thomas C. O'Brien – Gaston Fontaine – International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982) 6.

4. Kevin Seasoltz criticizes reliance on highly specialized language methods in his review of "Semiotics and Church Architecture." Kevin Seasoltz, "*Semiotics and Church Architecture*," by Gerard Lukken and Mark Searle. Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993. Pages, 135. Paper," *Worship* 68 (1994) 276-278, 278.

event *in situ* and taking in what she can from the proximity of the stimuli that present themselves there.

By robust, we mean that it can accomplish many tasks: it can describe, prescribe, interpret, critique, predict and manage the subject matter.

By omni-dimensional, we mean that, for this methodology, where any reality or data resides is immaterial. For instance, while a text requires a linear order for comprehension, this methodology can account for the liturgical reality or data originating from anywhere, at any time, and through any sensible sign. The stimuli may be linear, non-linear, above, below, in front or behind the participant, and may arrive through any of the five senses.⁵ It can also account for the lives and expectations of all participants. In the total immersion that is live liturgy, this approach can take it all in.

By all liturgical data, we mean all sensible corporate realities that may be known by a community of people rather than only by an individual: one may know what is revealed by stimuli, but not necessarily what may be within the mind of any individual unless that person reveals it as stimuli.

Liturgical data are specific kinds of evidence that can be known socially by the people of God. If they cannot be known socially, they are not liturgical data, although they may remain another kind of data that has liturgical pertinence and can be said to be intimately close to the action. For instance, someone's intention can be close to liturgical action. Nevertheless, because it is hidden until revealed through action, it is privy only to the holder of the intention and cannot be known. Therefore, while present, phenomena such as intentions are not liturgical. This social claim refers not only to human but also to divine sources insofar as, by definition and by covenant, God has revealed that God deals with creation through revelation – those stimuli that can be received.

Context – Paradigms

To put proximity into context, we examine three authors, focusing on their respective methodological enterprises: Joseph Gelineau,⁶ Kevin Irwin⁷ and Richard McCall.⁸

5. In addition to the five traditional senses, there are instances of synesthesia as well as newly identified senses.

6. Joseph Gelineau, "Une technique à retrouver le bon usage d'un modèle dans les prières liturgiques," *La Maison Dieu* 114 (1973) 85-96.

7. Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994).

8. Richard David McCall, *Do This: The Liturgy as Performance* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

Soon after the introduction of the vernacular, Gelineau tantalized us with calls for an oratorical toolkit to unpack the processes and elements of how speech works in the event.⁹ However, at the last moment, he focused on the goal of text generation¹⁰ rather than event analysis. This may be influenced by his work not only as musician, but as composer – as one who affixes music to the page.

Irwin offered a comprehensive approach to the event by transmuting all data to text, that which can be read.¹¹ Yet, in doing so, he had to reduce the minimum of five data sets to one, which is privileged by sight. Methodologically speaking, one can no more ‘read’ a liturgical event than smell a flower with a thermometer. With Irwin, there was a reliance on text and text analysis.

McCall broke away from text by appealing to Aristotle’s theory of drama¹² with an integral reliance on Bhaktain’s “once occurrent moment of being.”¹³ He did so to get at the dynamics of event, and yet, ultimately, was forced to rely on text to complete his approach.¹⁴

Writers, who rely on text-based analysis, seem to draw upon the following paradigms:

1. Presumption of first person analysis:¹⁵ Writers examine text and event as if the communications were an interpersonal conversation between two agents speaking in everyday life, proposing, listening and adjusting speech content to be modified in some way.¹⁶

9. Gelineau, “Une technique,” 87-88, 90 and 93.

10. *Ibid.*, 93.

11. In his introduction, Irwin specifically negates any analysis of ‘performance’, Irwin, *Context and Text*, xii.

12. McCall, *Do This*, 81.

13. *Ibid.*, 68.

14. McCall must call upon the text of the Roman canon to complete his otherwise event-based analysis. *Ibid.*, 135.

15. This tendency reaches as far back as Augustine. Luigi Alici, “Sign and Language,” in *Aurelius Augustinus, Teaching Christianity*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, 11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996) 38-42. It continues today with, for example, Zimmerman, who makes the case clear when claiming that liturgy does not preclude itself from the conversation generalization. Joyce Anne Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999) 6.

16. Bouley characterizes improvised speech as a way to generate text to be used by the speaker later, while Searle notes the interpersonal origins of speech – first person to first person. Alan Bouley, *From Freedom to Formula: The Evolution of the Eucharistic Prayer from Oral Improvisation to Written Texts*, Studies in Christian Antiquity, 21 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981) xvi-xvii; Mark Searle, “The Shape of the Future: A Liturgist’s Vision,” in *Sunday Morning: A Time for Worship. Papers from the Tenth Annual Conference of the Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, University of Notre Dame, June 15-18, 1981*, ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982) 144.

2. Reliance on liturgical text as data source: The root metaphor for liturgical studies is text,¹⁷ even to the extent of transforming other data to look and act like text.¹⁸

3. Acceptance of the trace: The approach to a trace medium, such as a document of a liturgical event, seems to accept what is in the document without a live-event critique, such as how is the event data encoded, what event data is missing or only partially encoded, and then to examine what the document can say about the event.¹⁹

4. Reduction of a liturgical event and/or data to one, fixed dimension: All components are transposed into codes that can carry content – this may be an historical function of the primary medium for liturgical theology, which has been paper.²⁰

5. Fixity of experience: A liturgical event is a stand-alone database capable of offering a distinct meaning that can be fixed and repeated. Since it is fixed, newness can only be identified as new text, such as the fact of an unscripted homily or a few “additional” words at prescribed times. The manner in which a text may be used receives little or no attention. Thus, the dynamics attached to spontaneity are not measured.²¹

6. Presumption that liturgical events are ideal, and therefore necessarily accomplish their goals.²²

17. Irwin notes that even though Bouyer's *Eucharist* is a valuable contribution, its use is limited because Bouyer's method limits access only to texts. Bouyer deals with what they say not how they say it. Irwin, “Method in Liturgical Theology – Context Is Text,” *Église et Théologie* 20 (1989) 407-424, 413.

18. Irwin, *Context and Text*, 54

19. Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, 8.

20. Nichols, recapping Ricoeur's de- and re-contextualizing of speech through text, stands as an example. Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics Interpreting Liturgical Rites in Performance* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1996) 23.

21. Cyprian Love's article on spontaneity in liturgy calls for ‘eschatological rhetoric’. Yet, it provides no means to connect spontaneity and eschatology. That Love is a musician, like Gelineau, may explain his insights into timing. Cyprian Love, “Liturgical Spontaneity as Eschatological Rhetoric,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008) 87-98. This paradigm also recalls the ramblings on “preservation of knowledge” in Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall and Associates, 1984) 578-579.

22. Explicitly noted by Bridget Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics*, 46. Also found here: “But it is in a fundamentally performative sense the liturgy, wherein the *scriptures are proclaimed*, the *prayers are prayed* and the *actions undertaken*, which *hands down* to us the living stories of our tradition for our appropriation and deepened transformation” (my italics), in David A. Stosur, “Liturgy and (Post)Modernity: A Narrative Response to Guardini's Challenge,” *Worship* 77 (2003) 22-41, 41.

7. Reliance on social sciences²³ to approach events.
8. Reliance on binaries,²⁴ such as either/or, A and -A.

Parsing these paradigms shows how each has limited application to the liturgical event or is logically invalid.

The first paradigm, first person speech, has no little or no application to liturgy. The liturgy, statistically speaking, contains only a speck of 1st person speech, save for an occasional greeting,²⁵ which, being the speech of one-on-many, cannot be said to be conversational (one-on-one). Otherwise, liturgical speech consists of a speaker saying the text of another – a 1st party speaking a 3rd party text. Conversational analogues become false analogies, categorically different from this kind of staged-speech. To call upon the organic conversation of 1st person speech is to bracket the (inorganic) hermeneutic gap in staged-speech.

The second paradigm, text as data source, is inapplicable from the point of view of logic. Consider the underlying presumption for the fixation on text as a tool for analysis – a fixation on fixity. Authors from De Saussure²⁶ to Zimmerman²⁷ claim that speech once written down is fixed. Once fixed, text can be examined with rigour and rules. Specifically, there is a residue of meaning that can be mined.

Yet, if science tells us that there is no stasis anywhere, and that even the solidity of the earth upon which we stand is highly dynamic at the micro- and macroscopic levels, then assuming that there is such a thing as true *fixed* text becomes *sui generis*? Among all the dynamic phenomena in the cosmos, is text the only exception?

Certainly speech or ideas can be written down, but that is all that happens. Once written, the text begins to degrade as surely as newly made mountains begin to erode. The world imminent to the affixing of speech or word-idea to paper is immediately left behind even as the ink dries. With more and more time having elapsed, it is lost altogether, only to become

23. This may be seen from Collin's 1974 article up to Gil Ostdiek's 2004 claim in a reprint of Mark Searle's "New Tasks" article. Mary Collins, "Liturgical Methodology and the Cultural Evolution in the United States," *Worship* 49 (1975) 85-102. Gil Ostdiek, "Introduction to: New Tasks, New Methods the Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies," in *Vision: The Scholarly Contributions of Mark Searle to Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Anne Y. Searle and Barbara Koester (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004) 101-103, 102.

24. Noted by McCall in terms of 'false binaries' to which one adds correctives, yet still in binary form. McCall, *Do This*, 49.

25. General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) 50, United States Catholic Conference, *General Instruction on the Roman Missal 2002* [PDF], Washington, 2003.

26. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1978) 32.

27. Zimmerman, *Liturgy and Hermeneutics*, 16-17.

imaginable.²⁸ Fixed text, just like the present tense, is illusory: useful to begin the imaginative enterprise, but always imprecise as a static starting point in a dynamic cosmos. Similarly, the idea of a residue of meaning may be discounted when considering widely divergent and unreliable eyewitness reports. There can be a wide divergence of opinion regarding any written text – one need only glance at research on a single pericope to see the mutual exclusivity of opinion. Surely, a *fixed* text would find more harmony of view, a *fixed* view as it were, but one is hard pressed to find it. Even the fact of reader response criticism demonstrates that the idea of a residue (a content, a stasis, a fixed meaning) must be put aside.

One may conclude that any approach to fixed text as a residue is no longer valid since it rests on the discounted notion of stasis. This does not deny the search for meaning, but forces the analyst to look elsewhere for an approach. Since humanity has done fairly well in building up artifacts, there must be something in the human tool kit that has always been working in that construction effort. Neither fixed text nor text-based analysis is that something. There may be depth in the ground and in the air, but there is no actual depth to a text. There are associations, illusions, allusions and alignments ... In short, there can be great complexity concerning a text, but that is due to fluidity of textual hermeneutics not fixity.

A simple historical reason why those who investigate live liturgy can set aside text-based analysis can be found in de Saussure. Even if one were to reject the futility of fixity just proposed, one would come face to face with de Saussure, who summarily dismissed the methodological confusion of wanting to study *parole* (event) using tools for *langage* (text) noting that text is social and 'fixed' while speech is idiosyncratic and 'fluid'.²⁹

The third paradigm, acceptance of the trace, appears to be either presumed or under-studied, save for comparative text analysis. The extent to which a liturgical text captures all the data available is usually unexamined. That a text cannot capture all of the event data may simply be given and accepted. Exactly what is missing is perhaps presumed lost, unimportant or lacking a taxonomy.³⁰

28. In part, this is what Ricoeur's multiple contextualizing references.

29. De Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, also noted in: Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) 338.

30. For instance, Leachman does not examine non-verbal evidence for the Holy Spirit when he claims that a certain prayer set has no reference to the Holy Spirit in the text of the prayers. This is partially accurate. While the term Holy Spirit is not noted in the oration, epicletic actions are noted in the rubrics. Thus, one can argue that there is evidence for the Holy Spirit in the text. James G. Leachman, "The Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit in the Period of Purification and Enlightenment in *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum*," *Studia Liturgica* 36 (2006) 185-200.

The fourth paradigm, regarding trace documents, may be a function of the historicity of analysis. Until recently, ‘pen to paper’ was the default data capture device. Only in the last decade has one seen the rise of robust, easily used, storable and retrievable technologies that capture much of the dynamics of event – all encapsulated within a smart phone.³¹ Previous data capture gave us words on a medium. Now that we have tools for dynamic data capture, there is a means to understand what is captured and what is not. Just as text as analytical tool is inaccurate for an event, so the reduction of event to text in writing is incomplete, save as an aide memoire for a witness of that event, allowing her afterwards to speak of it with confidence.

The fifth paradigm, fixity of experience, is a prisoner to an assumption determined by the *fixity* of text. There are no means for text to introduce anything not already on the page. Where would this new thing arise, except in the imagination of the reader-who-speaks? However, as we shall see, the liturgical event is highly mediated: there is no direct access to text by the assembly. There is only access to text through speakers of that text. There is a host of dynamics that play out in speech, such as volume, tone, reverberation, elocution, acoustic environment, expectations ... These contribute to a range of probabilities that set the stage for an evaluation of sound, and thus for the likelihood of anything new arising in the event, including the Word of God.

The sixth paradigm, ideal liturgy, most likely is the result of a lack of a methodology to account for success or failure of the rite.³² Authors acknowledge that they are presuming the liturgical text to be working in the event, but, since so often it does not work well, which is also documented, the claim for success seems to be aspiration at best.

The seventh paradigm, relying on social science, is indirect, oblique and lacks logical validity. Some favour especially cross-cultural approaches in anthropology. These seem to be indirect and, at the same time, to beg the question: if one calls upon the understanding of a different mode of event to understand one’s own events better, where is the assurance that the foreign events are understood well enough to be of service? If one has difficulty understanding a native event, by what means does one lay claim to understand the foreign event?

The eighth paradigm, binaries, is insufficient to account for all probabilities associated with a live event, and tends to favour the medium of

31. The fleeting nature of the liturgical event was lamented by Mark Searle. Mark Searle, “New Tasks, New Methods: The Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies,” *Worship* 57 (1983) 291-308, 297.

32. Ronald Grimes has examined success and failure in ritual behaviour. Ronald L. Grimes, “Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism,” *Semeia* 43 (1988) 103-122.

paper as well as the Western tradition of Cartesian dialectic. If text is fixed, then two options are probably sufficient to work through the text. But if the event, even an event based on text, is fluid then binaries are insufficient. One needs a much longer list of alternatives, perhaps omniaries, to begin to account for the myriad of options that actually occur. Probable outcomes in events can range from the very probable to the least likely. Outcomes, nonetheless, are always a function of having happened, regardless of the accuracy of prediction, intention or hope. On the other hand, text-based analysis always presumes the most probable outcome for meaning and effect, so much so that 'if it is written, so shall it be done'. Those who work in events professionally know that the range of probabilities is far greater than may feel comfortable to the layperson.

Proximity – Discussion

The methodology being proposed is based on and called by the name *proximity*. Using proximity as a methodology is to execute repeatedly these two questions: how close are things and how are things close? The proximity viewpoint recalls the Hebrew expression for 'I have': *יש לי*: there ... to me.³³ That simple phrase puts into relation two phenomena: the observer and that which the observer senses. Some 'thing' (there) is close to the 'witness' (to me). The two questions arise from that physical fact: how close is that thing to the witness? And how is that thing close? For example, a lilac bush and a bench may be 20 feet away from an observer, yet the scent of the bush assails her nostrils. How close is the bush? 20 feet or so from the witness. How is it close? The witness is almost overcome with its presence through scent. The lilac bush is far closer to the witness than the bench positioned beside it. Of the two objects, despite the equidistance, one is closer to the witness than the other.

While the basic relationship between observer and all other phenomena is built into the two questions, the observer can easily proceed to relationships among phenomena – how close are such and such objects to each other and how are they close, as seen from the relative point of view of the observer. For a field of study such as liturgical theology, the inclusion of the observer is vital to the outcomes of the study. Thus the proximity methodology positions itself fortuitously.

33. It removes the illusory present tense and, as a construct, restores dynamism to the event.

One sometimes forgets that liturgical theology is fashioned by a liturgical theologian. Proximity reminds one that any observer participates in the liturgical act, by his or her proximity to it. In some way, each observer is close to the act. A proximity analysis reveals at least three observational tendencies.

The least proximate is the use of texts as the key source of data. The data tend to be before the observer on paper, in articles, notes or liturgical books. While the observer may recall liturgical experience in an attempt to discern meaning on paper,³⁴ the direct stimulus still sits in front of her eyes on paper. The tone of the theology generated remains imaginative and speculative. A sign that the theology remains speculative consists of the pattern: because X is written on paper, X will have happened in the event. As noted above, this is one of the faulty paradigms of the ubiquitous text-based liturgical analysis. In a liturgical event, nothing is guaranteed.³⁵

A less proximate tendency involves the observer as assembly member, as presider or other discrete liturgical minister. Either way, the data is out there: either on the altar in front of the eyes of the assembly or in the nave as seen from the altar. Here too, the theology is more speculative insofar as each participant presumes X to happen when they speak or hear the words of the text. In other words, the speaking is unconsidered.³⁶

The most proximate tendency is when the observer is sensibly proximate in all modes of reception.³⁷ She touches phenomena; she smells, tastes, hears and sees them. In short, the liturgical action becomes incorporated within her body. This ingestion is proximity of the closest order. Here the theology is actual in the moment (*post facto* of strong stimuli) and probably shared. A sign of this quality of theology may be the fact of *new* or *surprising* speech and action that God has revealed to the community: the outcomes heard or otherwise received may be edifying and give new or renewed meaning to the text, for those struck by the stimuli strongly enough to notice. While the theologian may not be able to know the mind

34. Kavanagh reminds us that he has witnessed that about which he writes. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1984) 76-77.

35. Noted elegantly by Paul VI using a long list of matters that *depend*. "Paul VI Address to a Meeting of the Presbyterate of Rome, on Pastoral Effectiveness in the Ritual Use of the Sacraments, 29 October 1970: Not 6 (1970) 377-379," in O'Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979*, 712.

36. This phenomenon is noted in a lament by Kavanagh on the vacuity of liturgical leadership. Aidan Kavanagh, "Seeing Liturgically," in *Time and Community in Honor of Thomas J. Talley*, ed. J. Neil Alexander, NPM Studies in Church Music and Liturgy (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1990) 255-278, 275.

37. GIRM notes multiple instances of intensity of sensation required to provide a strong stimulus for response: volume and clarity of voice (32), clarity for placement of objects (307), strength of stimulus to elicit full, conscious and active participation (20). United States Catholic Conference, *General Instruction*.

of her fellow participants, which is a hermeneutical quandary, she can receive the sense of fullness, or not, of their participation. The shared probability depends on how other participants have experienced and responded to the two questions: how close is God and how is God close?

The two questions have different logical values: *that* one thing is close to another thing is a sufficient relationship,³⁸ while *how* one thing is close to another is a necessary relationship.³⁹ The repeated asking of the questions acts like an algorithm, applicable to all senses and thus pertinent to the Council's insistence on the sensorial.⁴⁰

1. Smell – how close is the incense to one? How is it close? Possible answer: the incense is 40 feet away but very strong in (or very close to) one's nose because a good amount has been applied to more than one coal. An ancillary note may be that whenever one smells incense, the memory of church is brought close to one's imagination or awareness.

2. Touch – how close is the parishioner behind one? How is that parishioner close? Possible answer: she is within an arm's length and so available for the Kiss of Peace without moving too far afield. Yet, she has been coughing and sniffing and therefore may not or should not offer any physical contact. She is, then, not that close to one.

3. Hearing – how close is the lector's speech to one? How is it close? Probable answer: the lector stands 30 feet away and one can hear sound coming from the lector's position but the words are too close together and all one can hear is a blended sound. Ergo, while the sound of the lector's voice is close, the lector's speech is not at all close.

4. Taste – how close is the host to one? How is it close? Possible answer A: the typical wafer is on one's tongue, but there is no sense of any taste. Possible answer B: the cube of bread is on one's tongue and one can taste bread. Ergo, the wafer may be close but is not sensed while the cube is both close and sensed as bread being close. It is likely that the wafer will be more difficult to recognize as bread while the cube is more easily recognized as bread. These two outcomes will have an effect on the claim "bread of life" because one object will be more easily recognizable as *bread*. It may be close to our expectation and the normal use of the term *bread*.

38. The Dictionary of Philosophy notes that sufficiency "consists of the necessary relation of every object or event to every other." Dagobert D. Runes (ed.), *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Littlefield, Adams, 1972) 306.

39. This would at least be a physical necessity in so far as physical properties among objects will help determine the relationship. For example, a scent has a necessary relation with the nose but not the eye. That is how a rose is close to a person in that sense. See Runes, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 207-208.

40. SC 7, O'Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979*, 6.

5. Seeing – how close is the elevation to one and how is it close?⁴¹ The priest elevates the host at a distance of about 50 feet. What if one is seated behind a column, or the priest has used a small communion host, or has moved very quickly or slowly with a large host? Ergo, one sees nothing because of the column; or, one sees nothing because the host is too small; or, one sees nothing because the action happened too quickly to see what had happened; or, one sees a bright white object held for a moment high above the priest's head.

Anyone in the liturgical action can be close to sights, sounds, aromas, tastes and touches. Each sense is unique – some senses are associated closely, even symbiotically, yet each retains its own language pertinent to the sense. Proximity as a language brings them altogether into a single language irrespective of reality or data set. Diverse realities can be discussed using proximity as being close to each other even if measured by different instruments. Because one does not see the smell of incense does not mean that the smell does not have an impact. The smell simply does not have a visual impact, which explains to a certain extent the paucity of non-visual data in much text-based liturgical theology as well as the difficulties in handling such data using text-based tools when they are attempted.

While the idea to use proximity as methodology was the result of a sudden insight, liturgical theologians have already made explicit use of the notion. For instance, Bouley describes the “close proximity”⁴² of the two blessings prayers during the early evolution of the Eucharistic rite. Kavanagh describes the rites themselves as “time spent in public proximity to God,”⁴³ while Nichols describes prayer in which witnesses find the “baffling proximity and distance of God.”⁴⁴ Implicitly, Chauvet calls upon proximity with “Faith lives only from the space between the three poles [scripture, sacraments, ethics]. It is precisely this space which concretely

41. We are focusing on Roman Catholic liturgy, which, since Vatican II, has revealed all liturgical action. The so-called Tridentine rite concealed action from view, with an attendant liturgical theology that was quite distinct from current understanding. The hiding of action itself became the object of view, and so the hiding of objects became arguably a holy object. Proximity can describe concealed or hidden things as and how they speak of what they hide. That which is hidden, for example, is close to the assembly but how is it close – it is hidden and as a Stimulus-Response speaks differently than that which is visible. For instructions on revealing action, see SC 91, 92, 96 and 98. O'Brien, *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979*, 108-110.

42. Bouley, *From Freedom to Formula*, 86.

43. Kavanagh uses the term proximity on a number of occasions (62, 140, 154) beside this use. Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 61.

44. Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics*, 73.

mediates the distance between God and us, our respect for God's difference."⁴⁵ And Collins suggests a proximity fact about all ritual activity, "... the content of all ritual is an affirmation about relationships."⁴⁶

Note that these writers and Edward T. Hall, who founded the proxemics school,⁴⁷ focus more on the first of the two proximity questions, that things are close with the implications of that closeness on the observer. A due diligence use of proximity necessitates the asking of both questions all the time.

Paradigm Shifts

Proximity analysis gives rise to paradigm shifts that more precisely account for the liturgical event:

1. Analysis of third party content spoken by a first person speaker: Only when one has described precisely how liturgical text gets to an assembly, through the medium of a liturgical minister, has one begun to address the event dynamics at work.⁴⁸

2. Reliance on unavoidable dynamic event data: By using pertinent measurements, sensors and senses to explain sense data (what is close to what), one has direct access to the event itself.

3. Event trace critique: Proximity analysis can examine trace documents and help uncover what these contain with precision, and determine what is necessarily missing or presumed.⁴⁹

4. Ordo as algorithm: Proximity, by being able to handle any data set (all things are close), can account for the identification of new data and how they are brought close to the repeating elements of the ordo, and how these proximities might elicit probable outcomes.⁵⁰

45. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001) 40.

46. Mary Collins, "Critical Questions for Liturgical Theology," *Worship* 53 (1979) 302-317, 308.

47. Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966, 1990).

48. See Gelineau's call for an oratorical toolkit. "Une technique," 90.

49. See Searle's insistence on surface analysis before drawing conclusions. "New Tasks, New Methods," 299.

50. All chess pieces regardless of name and function move, strategize and execute tactics by two rules: how close each is to the other and how each is close. In other words, chess operates solely by the two-step algorithm called proximity. Chess functions solely in proximate terms and follows proximity-based rules comprising a finite set of objects with a set of infinite outcomes. Two questions yield infinite answers. Waldrop notes the chess inspiration when documenting a meeting between John Holland and Brian Arthur to discuss adaptive systems and illustrates the finite-infinite characteristics of the game. Mitchell A. Waldrop, *Complexity, the Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) 150-152.

5. Event success and failure: Proximity does not presume an ideal working but investigates how success/failure works by examining how things are close.⁵¹

6. Proximity as descriptive: If facts are naught but compromises,⁵² then proximity's ever present descriptive prowess⁵³ and necessary inclusion of the observer allows the analyst to keep a fresh view of what is a fact, thus disabusing the analyst to simply accept that anything "ought to" happen.

7. Necessary omniaries:⁵⁴ Because it accounts for all data sets and their measureable realities, proximity can go beyond binaries and accommodate the widest range of multiple probabilities as inputs and outcomes. It can account for that which de Saussure feared – the chimera of speech, movement and the many other dynamics involved in the event.

Applications of Proximity

There are at least six applications identified so far in a proximity analysis of liturgy: descriptive, interpretive, critical, prescriptive, predictive and managerial. As presented below, these applications are intended only to demonstrate the methodology and not to exhaust any one issue.

To demonstrate that proximity can be used for text-based research as well as event research, some of the applications involve historical issues with data found in manuscripts or other literature. The rationale is to show that as a methodology, proximity can explain data that other text-based analytics have failed to do. Thus, it can be argued that proximity, as a methodology, helps to complete the body of methods used there.

Descriptive

Proximity's strength is in description and the ability to revert to the descriptive in any other application, thus always keeping an eye on the realities or data under study. Elsewhere, asking the two proximity questions of

51. Searle begins to address success and failure when trying to address how text becomes prayer. Searle, "New Tasks," 300. See Grimes on failure. Ronald Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo, ON: Ron Grimes eBook, 2007) 6, 226.

52. "What are facts but compromises? A fact merely marks the point where we have agreed to let investigation cease." Attributed to Bliss Carman, Author unknown, "On Having Known a Poet," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1906, 712.

53. Searle too insists on descriptive capabilities for a working methodology. "New Tasks," 297.

54. Omni-ary, pertaining to everything at once. Also, one might contrast sequences in regard to witness, so that instead of a con-sequence or a sub-sequence, one might have to consider omni-sequence, or the position of being at the focus point of all things or having to account for the trace or following of all data regardless of origin.

a Roman Catholic Eucharistic liturgy yielded a minimum of 120 event components, grouped together with further proximity queries into 17 tables and subsequently into three major categories.⁵⁵ Here, we would simply list the tables under the categories:

Table of Liturgical Event Proximities

Main Category	Tables
Media Proximities	Proximity of Space Proximity of Sound Proximity of Body – Discrete Performer Proximity of Body – Crowd Proximity of Smell, Touch, Taste Proximity of Décor Proximity of Objects Proximity of Text Proximity of Roles
Action Proximities	Proximity of Manipulation Proximity of Movement Proximity of Speech Proximity of Helps and Hindrances Proximity of Context, Content and Meaning Proximity of Transactions and Responsibility Proximity of Time
Witness Proximities	Proximity of Witness

Interpretive

While likely not of any current interest to the vast majority of Roman Catholics, a long standing and unresolved debate over the presence of an epiclesis in the Roman Canon can find a plausible solution using proximity analysis. The solution is not to be found in the text of the prayer but in the actions associated with it, that is, actions brought close to the speaking of the prayer. Note that this application is an illustration of proximity in text analysis.

As early as 1502, Burckhardt's *Ordo* had, in the prefatory rubrics, *inclinat caput* at the words of consecration. This action remains in *missale romanum* editions through to 1968. As the centuries unfolded, other rubrics instructed the priest to lean elbows on the edge of the altar, to pick up the paten or chalice, and to say the Institution Narrative "*super*" or upon the elements.

55. James O'Regan, "Taxonomy of Liturgy and Theatre: Structural Similitude," *Eumenica* 1 (Spring 2008), no. 1, 9-34.

Proximity suggests a non-verbal interpretation of the actions noted just above whereby objects are brought close to the speaker's mouth. The breath, organically associated with and generating the sound waves carrying speech, leaves the mouth and can be felt as moving air for as much as a foot from the mouth. The breath of the words, the dynamic airflow, touches whatever is put in front of the mouth. The speaking of the words *upon* the elements involved the breath touching the elements. As such, proximity claims that there was a physical epiclesis that was done on-the-fly as the words were spoken. If that is the case, and there are other illustrations whereby breathing on an object is epicletic,⁵⁶ then there was no need for a distinct text-based epiclesis, such as those found in the current Eucharistic Prayers (save for Eucharistic Prayer I). Rather than a prayer text epiclesis, spoken following the speaking of the Institution Narrative, here one had an epiclesis performed as the Institution Narrative was uttered. The epiclesis was so close to the words spoken as to be concurrent or simultaneous. What was missing in the prayer text was found in the action accompanying that text – for the Roman Canon, the epiclesis was in the doing of it.

Critical

This critical application pertains to the literature and illustrates how proximity thinking can fine-tune or adjust the precision of an analysis. In his *Context and Text*, Kevin Irwin makes the following claim for the liturgical event:

In essence, liturgy is an *act of theology*, an act, whereby the believing Church addresses God, enters into dialogue with God, makes statements about its belief in God and symbolizes this belief ... Understood this way, the act of liturgy is *primary* theology in the sense that the experience of liturgy concerns direct address to God and encounter with God.⁵⁷

Asking the proximity question 'how is God close to us' reveals a gap in the line of reasoning above. Irwin begins with the response (address) of the Church to God, or 'how the Church is close to God'. From a proximity point of view, the claim is that we are somehow close enough to God to speak to Him. However proximity suggests a prior phenomenon that must

56. Aidan Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1978) 56, 60-61; International Committee on English in the Liturgy, *Rites I* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1976) 42-43.

57. Irwin, *Context and Text*, 44-45.

have occurred: God must be close to us and close in a specific way (how God is close). This prior proximity is not addressed in the book.⁵⁸

However, liturgy claims to be 'God speaking'. This claim may be found in its prayer texts, such as the simple *verbum domini*⁵⁹ at the end of readings of the Liturgy of the Word. The liturgical prayers declare that all creation is gift, e.g., the blessings at the Prayers over the Gifts. Not only do the prayers of the liturgy declare the gift nature of its text and action, the proximities within the liturgy make the same declaration. All liturgical prayer and all elements found in the liturgical books are gift; they are "other" than the ministers who work with them. This is one of the salient points about the liturgy being non-conversational and specifically being the 1st party speaking of 3rd party content. Therefore, each text must be heard first by the speaker before being used. There is no other way of working it. That is what happens because that is what must happen. Before we speak an alien⁶⁰ text, words that do not originate from us, we must first "receive" it by eye and ear, but especially by ear, to have it make sense, to make it ours, to incorporate it. A cold reading may make sense by virtue of "anticipated hearing" (a developed skill that estimates the probability of what the sound will be like) but is not so proved until the moment of speech. It is by far best practice to speak a reading (to re-hear-se it) before making it public.

Proximity says that liturgy first and foremost is not theology but epiphany, which nevertheless embraces and makes room for theology in an exact proximate sequence. What the proximity shows is the precise detail of how such communication happens. In each of the claims for Church, "addresses," "enters into dialogue," "makes statements" and "symbolizes," there is a missing initial step that is quite plain to see in the taxonomies of proximity among: minister to text, minister to assembly, minister to speech, assembly to speech, assembly to minister. That before addressing, speaking (enters into dialogue and making statements) and symboling, some one person is first in proximity to text while under witness. A complete list of action in liturgy would need augmentation and rearrangement.

58. From my reading, this lacuna is not specific to Irwin. Most writers somehow presume that God has spoken in liturgy without attempting to explain how that happens in the liturgical event, and rather rely on dogmatic or sacramental theory. The gap seems to be ubiquitous in the literature.

59. In English, the gospel response, "The Gospel of the Lord," differs from the Latin, "*verbum domini*."

60. Cf. M. Chekov: "The play remains foreign to the performer until he knows how to act the content, or rather until he has the capacity to act it." Michael Chekov, *On the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991) 85.

Prescriptive

Proximity can prescribe strategies and tactics for formation. When training ministers, proximity demonstrates how to be ‘physically’ open to the work of the Spirit by addressing the physicality of the rite alone. It exegetes the action required for liturgical ‘success’ or ‘hearing God speak’.

A proximity analysis of how Sacramentary or Lectionary text reaches the assembly uncovers 13 discrete, consequential steps that always apply to the speaking of 3rd party text⁶¹ in events where text is overtly used.⁶² These steps answer the questions: how close is the text to the assembly and, especially, how it is close. The latter necessarily involves a minister speaking the text – there is no other liturgical way for text to reach assembly at the same time, even if somehow a signal were to be given to the assembly to begin reading a missalette *en masse*.

Each step has a management aspect to it, such as the brightness of the light hitting the text, or the type of Sacramentary or Lectionary used (some use typed sheets for ‘special’ readings that may have unwelcome font styles and sizes that inhibit an easy read). Anytime there is a choice that can be made, there are prescriptions available for best practice, or, in conciliar terms, practices that elicit full, conscious and active participation.

Isolating a couple of steps allows us to investigate the sound of speech as it reaches (comes close to) the assembly’s ears at more or less the same time. Depending on a number of proximity factors, but here reduced to one – acoustic space – the sounds of the words reaching the assembly can be distinct or muddled. Distinct words are those that are not too close to each other in space-time. The speaker allows each word to decay acoustically, making auditory room for the next word. The time required to have this clarity varies, but, more or less in many churches, is three seconds. Words that are heard closer than that optimal time can be misheard or not heard at all. A set of two or more words that are too close together can easily become the new and usually strange sound of an unknown or confusing compound word. These too-proximate-words become a word misheard. Words that are too close together and that do not suggest a new semantic reality often simply become white noise, an unending blur of vowelings (*sic*). The assembly simply does not hear such words at all.

The pace of speech (how close the words are to each other) can be a function of choice, habit and/or nerves. Regardless of the source, a prescriptive application of proximity would be to *direct* the speaker to make

61. O’Regan, *How Close Is God? How Is God Close?*, 120-123.

62. The same steps apply to theatrical events, but only to part of the rehearsal process and not to the actual public event itself.

more room between each word spoken in the specific space, until such a point that the words are heard distinctly and with a sense of flow of the sound of the speech, in which meaning will have a chance at becoming apparent and without prejudicing what that meaning might be.

A formation implication of this *directing* would be to impart, in the speaker, a visceral, auditory sense of the “correct” pace for whichever space one finds oneself in, through repeated and directed sessions that allow the speaker to make mistakes, to take in guidance and eventually to have a built-up sense of the minimum conditions of clarity for liturgical speech. A thus formed liturgical speaker will know if and when she is using the correct proximities of speech for whichever liturgical space in which she may find herself. Abusing the correct pace, she will be able to rue, at least, the negative outcomes: those of poor praise and worship, and inferior liturgy.

Predictive

As a research tool, proximity is very good as generating questions, and predicting testable outcomes. An outcome that does not fulfil a prediction will emerge because of the algorithmic rigour inherent in the methodology. Nevertheless, this robust means of patterning can offer testable predictions that do prove to be correct.

As an example, recapping the epicletic proximities above, it requires not too great a stretch of the imagination to predict that the elements coming close will very likely at some point become too close and prompt charges of abuse. Already one can see a centuries-long progression to a closer proximity of the elements, from Burckhardt’s inclined head to the later bowing, elbow leaning, grasping and elevation of the elements.

It takes three to four hundred years, but such an abuse of proximity does indeed arise as hypothesized, with manuals of rubrics making note of the abuse and calling on priests to avoid breathing too heavily on the host.⁶³

Managerial

A proximity analysis of Episcopal liturgy can call for a new ministry at the diocesan level, reporting to the bishop.

63. Toussaint-Joseph Romsee, *Praxis celebrandi missam, tum privatam, tum solemnen, juxta ritum romanum, ad mentem rubricarum Missalis Romani et Decretorum S.R.C.* (Mechliniae: P.J. Hanicq, 1838) 160. John Berthram O’Connell, *The Celebration of Mass a Study of the Rubrics of the Roman Missal* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1941) 101.

The larger proximity question asks how a bishop balances his responsibility for liturgical oversight in his diocese⁶⁴ with the other requirement that normally he is the celebrant at any liturgy he attends.⁶⁵ How close are the two ‘requirements’ in an event? Since one cannot be in two places at one time, it is clear that a bishop who celebrates cannot observe himself from a distance. A bishop, who thinks he is communicating well, may very well not be doing so, but who will inform him of that fact? Whom would he trust in that judgement?

A minister well-versed in proximity techniques can be a trusted source of feedback since the phenomena and data are clear to the bishop and the analyst, not just for episcopal liturgies but for all liturgies in the diocese. The bishop and analyst can talk the same language and know that they do not impinge on the data sets, nor argue from any preference of style.

The bishop remains the chief liturgist of his diocese and can be well informed about the liturgical health of his own liturgy and those of the diocese, knowing how to uncover and eventually to resolve problems when they arise.

Conclusion

Proximity as a methodology directly accounts for and discusses all the dynamic data sets in a single language. It is deceptively simple, consisting of only two questions, but introducing rigour from the outset and producing research propositions easily. It may be seen as an *ur*-methodology to the scientific method: since all phenomena are somehow close to each other, all methods of analyzing the specificities of those data are also close to each other. They can be fruitfully restated in terms of proximity to help understand how the subject matter under study is close to the researcher – us.

Proximity provides those who wish to examine the liturgy as it is done in space-time with real people and a full complement of dynamics a robust means to gather, interpret, critique, predict, prescribe and manage the event and its data. We would posit that proximity might be the most direct way into liturgical theology of the liturgical event.

1823 Belval Crescent
Ottawa ON
Canada K1C 6J3
oregan@jamesoregan.com

James O'REGAN

64. GIRM 22, 91, 387. United States Catholic Conference, *General Instruction*.

65. GIRM 387, 92. United States Catholic Conference, *General Instruction*.