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Review of David Fagerberg, *The Liturgical Cosmos: The World through the Lens of the Liturgy*, Emmaus Academic, Steubenville (OH) 2023, 288 pp.

D. Fagerberg is already known firstly for his mastery in liturgical theology, and secondly as a scientist who combines the epistemological status of an academic theologian with the intuition of a man who truly believes in God: something that is manifested in his writing. His work has escalated over the years, beginning with his first work, *What is liturgical theology?* and from there he has progressed to the theological core of liturgical life with his other major works, such as *Liturgical Asceticism, Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology, Liturgical Mysticism*, and *Liturgical Dogmatics*. Eventually, *Liturgical Cosmos* stands as the last but not least oeuvre in this climax of theological works. It is also the first volume made up of thirteen articles and it characterizes his interesting journey in his much-beloved liturgical theology. As a matter of fact, in the book's introduction, Fagerberg registers an intriguing definition of what the term *liturgy* means, which is the primary field of his epistemological work. "Liturgy is the perichoresis of the Trinity kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification" (p. xv). Having that phrase in mind, which consists of the soteriological synergy between God's initiative and human response, I will go through the articles of this fascinating book, as the writer himself has given new titles and divided them in five thematic areas (*Liturgy and Asceticism, Liturgy and Theology, Liturgy and Its Celebration, Liturgy and the Cosmos* & *Liturgy and Person*). I shall begin with the second area, because I consider that within it lies the hermeneutical key of Fagerberg's theological argument.

Surely, Fagerberg's hero, is Fr. A. Schmemmann, who inspired him to identify that the Latin motto "Lex orandi lex est credendi", is comprised of a synthesis of three interdependent concepts: liturgy, theology and asceticism. In fact, he dedicates two articles in his book (*Schmemmann's*

Cost & Schmemmann's Anchor) to evaluate Schmemmann's contribution to the field of liturgical theology, as a reintegration of patristic synthesis between ascetical theology and liturgical experience. Unfortunately, Western theology has not given sufficient consideration to the patristic paradigm, approaching liturgy through patristic texts, only in a scholastic-academic way, without adopting the mindset and spirit of Church fathers. In this regard Fagerberg writes emphatically: "The Western approach to theology teaches one how to look at the texts of the fathers but stops short of teaching one how to think in union with the fathers" (p. 67). It is truly a remarkable paradigm of ecumenicity, for a Roman Catholic theologian to regard an Orthodox theologian as his finest *exemplar hominis* in theological science, recognizing that the latter has fully assimilated the Eastern paradigm as a manifestation of the perennial ecclesiastical experience. Although Fagerberg refers to a significant number of Eastern Orthodox theologians such as V. Lossky, P. Nellas, and G. Mantzaridis, I would like to note here that a reference to Fr. Georges Florovsky, who was the first to inspire Schmemmann to recover the connection between patristic theology with liturgical experience, would have been most appropriate at this point.*

Another interesting area of the book is the concept of *liturgical asceticism*, to which Fagerberg has dedicated one of his major works. Here in two articles (*Desert Asceticism & Liturgical Fasting*) he aims to clarify his robust idea about the connection between liturgy and asceticism. Actually, he provides seven definitions about the concept of *liturgical asceticism*, but in my opinion the most appropriate is the first: "Asceticism that is liturgical is asceticism that has liturgy in

* G. Florovsky, "The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology", *Anglican Theological Review* 31 (1949), 70: "true theology can spring only out of a deep liturgical experience"; idem, *The Catholicity of the Church*, in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky I. Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Buechervertriebsanstalt, Vaduz 1987, 37-55, 50: "But there is much of which the Church testifies not in a dogmatic, but in a liturgical, manner, in the symbolism of the sacramental ritual, in the imagery of prayers, and in the established yearly round of commemorations and festivals. Liturgical testimony is as valid as dogmatic testimony".

its ontological condition” (p. 41). What the author is really trying to demonstrate here is that asceticism is not only for monks and desert fathers but for every baptized member of Christ’s Body (Ecclesia), as its true vocation is to participate in God’s life and be deified by His Grace. Fagerberg refers to P. Evdokimov and his idea about *interiorized monasticism* (p. 22), but he goes a step further by connecting the secular asceticism of our days with liturgical life.

Staying within asceticism’s thematic area Prof. Fagerberg introduces another interesting concept: *Ascetic aesthetics*, explored in his fascinating article *The Beauty of God as Ground for Obedience in the Ascetical-Contemplative Tradition* (titled as *Beauty and Asceticism*). Here, he interprets *Ascetic aesthetics*, a Western perception of God’s beauty, as *kallos*, (an Eastern concept of divine beauty) a profound and clear experience of the ascetic person who strives for the kingdom of heaven in this life. “Ascetic aesthetics is the splendor of truth in a person who obeys God’s designs” (p. 34). Fagerberg’s ecumenical interest is evident here, as his intense research into ascetic texts of Eastern theology – particularly the Philokalia (a love of *kallos*) – is combined with the appropriate Western paradigms, such as those found in the early scholastics, including Thomas Aquinas. I consider that for Fagerberg God’s Beauty is more about the quality of asceticism and the struggle that transforms the person, than about the attainment of beauty through God’s grace which is the ultimate level. This argument is clarified in one of the book’s final articles (*Icon as Image of the Deified Person*) where Fagerberg describes the ascetic person as a *homo viator* – a pilgrim in this life - who chooses virtues over vices to manifest Christian virtues as a mimetic way of life in Christ. Surely the application of virtues requires from the ascetic to struggle with himself, often in a state of pain. However, through this struggle he finds the virtue (power) to strengthen himself and ultimately be transformed by the grace of God (p. 238).

Book Reviews

In conclusion, *Liturgical Cosmos* is a groundbreaking work that is well worth reading, as its field, liturgical theology offers unexpected insights for modern theology. Fagerberg's aim is to interpret today's theology through the lens of liturgical experience – a way of interpretation which is more a state of ontological experience than a scientific method. Moreover, the author's approach in this book is truly fascinating, as he demonstrates deep expertise in his field and passionately seeks to share this knowledge with his readers. In every article of his oeuvre, he enables his readers to grasp his ideas from the outset, providing them with a clear understanding of where he intends to guide them. The quality of the edition and publication matches the high academic standard of the author's work. Finally, if we could view the world in a eucharistic way, through the lens of the liturgy, then we would fulfill our ontological orientation as *homo adorans* as Fagerberg suggests in this remarkable theological work.

Dimitrios Avdelas