



UNDERSTANDING RELIGION

PETA GOLDBURG

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Contents

About the author	XX
Acknowledgements	XX
Introduction	XX
How to use this textbook	XX
Cambridge GO	XX
Strand 1: Sacred texts	XX
Chapter 1 Old Testament	XX
Chapter 2 New Testament	XX
Chapter 3 Christian spiritual writings and wisdom	XX
Strand 2: Beliefs	XX
Chapter 4 Trinity: God, Jesus the Christ, Spirit	XX
Chapter 5 Human existence	XX
Chapter 6 World religions	XX
Strand 3: Church	XX
Chapter 7 Liturgy and sacraments	XX
Chapter 8 People of god	XX
Chapter 9 Church history	XX
Strand 4: Christian life	XX
Chapter 10 Moral formation	XX
Chapter 11 Mission and justice	XX
Chapter 12 Prayer and spirituality	XX
Glossary	XX
References	XX
Index	XX

About the author

Peta Goldberg has been teaching in the visual arts for over 20 years. She has taught art, English and visual communication design in a number of Catholic and independent schools. Currently Head of Creative Arts at Genazzano FCJ College in Kew, she has successfully established a vibrant and diverse creative arts curriculum including introducing visual communication design, media, and design and technology while in this role. Joanne has been an exam panel member, assessor and deputy chief examiner for the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) Visual Communication Design exam. A member of the Visual Communication Design Teachers Association, Joanne has participated in conferences and actively contributes to the development of curriculum and assessment of visual communication design.

Her other passions are her family and travel. Joanne has successfully introduced an overseas tour for the Creative Arts students at Genazzano to New York City and Washington DC, where design and art are embedded into those cities' culture.

On weekends and after hours away from work, Joanne enjoys spending time with her husband, son and daughter as well as walking her dog, Sugar, and cuddling her cat, Pumpkin.

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Introduction

It is often difficult to define something which is familiar. If we were asked to define 'liturgy' we may not be able, even though we participate in liturgies on a regular basis. People have differing and sometimes conflicting views on what liturgy is. One of the difficulties in describing liturgy is that, like the church itself, liturgy is a living mystery: liturgy is always open to fresh insight and deeper understanding. The liturgy is always more than we can say and eludes precise description. There is, however, much that can be said about it to help us understand.

The liturgy is a continuing celebration of God's ongoing presence in the world. The Second Vatican Council described the liturgy as 'source and summit' of Christian life. It is a pattern of initiative and response: God's initiative and the Christian person's response, which underlies all of the Christian life. The pattern of initiative and response is clearly evidenced in liturgy. God's outreach is expressed in the readings from the *Bible* and the gift of God comes to the community through the sacraments. People respond to both reading and sacrament.

The first and basic sign of God's presence in the world is through the gathered congregation. Coming together as a congregation is a sign and symbol of what God is doing and working in the world. When the congregation gathers, it consists of people with their strengths and weakness. That is why, at the beginning of the Mass, there is a Penitential Rite which not only calls for a cleansing of personal imperfections but also acknowledges that as a group of Christians we may not have lived up to our common vocation and been a light for the world and sign of hope and renewal. Sometimes, because of our self-interest or the distractions of our consumer focused society, we fail to notice the presence of God in the world and in our lives. The Penitential Rite reminds us that when we repent of our sins and imperfections, God meets us with grace which enable us to move forward into the sacrament.

Liturgy has several defining characteristics:

- Liturgy is the *public* and **official** worship of the church; it is not just the Mass and the sacraments, but includes all the Liturgy of the Hours, rituals which are part of RCIA and Christian funerals, as well as rituals for the consecration of members of religious orders, and formal blessings.
 - Liturgy is the action of the church offering worship to God where the baptised faithful are led by Christ.
 - Liturgy uses specific signs and symbols as an outward expression of an inward change that is happening for individuals in the community.

The liturgy should be of the present but point to the future; of this world but point to a way of being in the world which recognises a depth of meaning. The liturgy draws on elements of our lives to teach us how to house the presence of God in our lives; it teaches us to listen to the voice of God in and through the voice of others. Liturgy is the expression of faith and love of Christians; it also shapes and deepens the faith and love of believers.

The liturgy begins and ends with a Sign of the Cross which is sign of God's love for us and Jesus' human response to that love. When the congregation gathers, it consists of people with their strengths and weakness.

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How to use this textbook

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