

New Creation, by Frank C. Senn

reviewed by [Roderick T. Leupp](#) in the [October 24, 2001](#) issue

Anyone who uses the word "worldview" in a book title had better be prepared to deliver. Frank C. Senn, author of the magisterial *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (1997) and one of today's leading liturgical theologians, does indeed essay "a liturgical worldview" in these tightly constructed and agilely crafted chapters, most of which originated as lectures delivered in Europe and the U.S.

The redundancy that occasionally plagues lectures turned into books is here largely absent. Three or four central ideas form *New Creation's* marrow, and their repetition is necessary. For Senn, whose vocation as a Lutheran pastor is evident on every page, liturgy is the work of the Christian people offered up to the Triune God. All congregations, whether structured or spontaneous, practice liturgy every time they gather together. In that regard, liturgy can be defined phenomenologically and descriptively simply as what happens in worship.

Senn is especially interested in the quality of our worship. Because liturgy demonstrates what it is like to live in a redeemed world, it has ethical and even political implications. Liturgy is a performance where the "kingdom of God is made present, manifested, epiphanized to those with the eyes of faith to see it," Senn writes. The baptized worship God on behalf of the world. Being and doing, form and function coalesce in the liturgy as nowhere else.

What is true of Senn's artful prose is also true of the liturgy. It should not call attention to itself, but must point beyond itself to God. Liturgy that stretches to become a worldview overcomes the shackles of "secular sacrality" on the one hand and "bourgeois profanity" on the other. The baptized who do this representative work become the priesthood of the entire world.

These universalizing ideas are supported by Senn's sources and examples, drawn from 20 centuries of liturgical practice. Two of Senn's chief influences are Eastern Orthodox (Alexander Schmemmann) and Roman Catholic (Aidan Kavanagh).

This book's great strength is the consistency and vigor with which Senn applies his primal definition of liturgy to virtually every part of the Christian spectrum. He relates liturgy to theology, God, Christ, church, creation, world and worship. The book is also ethical, pastoral and even psychological, since liturgical theology must be concerned with the one who worships as well as the One who is worshiped. Themes of hospitality, culture, evangelism and prayer round out Senn's discussion.

Careful readers may have two qualms. Some may want more explicit mention of the Holy Spirit. Others may question Senn's confidence that he can mark off the ephemeral from the eternal and the profane from the holy. But Senn's preference for the ancient and the pastoral invites trust. His academic credentials and thoughtful analysis seal his credibility. In his liturgical passion, Senn may only be preaching to the already converted. Yet whatever one's theology, he helps one understand why it is so difficult for modern people to worship.