

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Nottingham		
Unit of Assessment: UOA31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: The Roots of Christian Worship: Improving Liturgical Practices, Shaping Teaching of Clergy and Fostering Better Worship Among Dioceses, Church Assemblies and Lay Groups.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Thomas O'Loughlin	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Theology	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2009-20
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013 and 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Through bridging the gulf between historical theology and community practice today, O'Loughlin's work has impacted Christian churches by:</p> <p>i. improving liturgical practices – renewed theological interpretations have resulted in greater understanding of, and increased engagement with these practices in the UK, Europe, New Zealand in dioceses and parishes. Research has transformed the liturgical practice of Catholic bishops, Benedictine monks, Poor Clare nuns, Evangelical congregations, and lay reform groups.</p> <p>ii. shaping the curricula of theological colleges – the research has directly influenced the curricula of The Church of Ireland Theological Institute, Northeastern Seminary, Helsinki Lutheran Church and the training of several clergy cohorts.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Christian churches are communities who celebrate their religion in rituals. These rituals inscribe their memories, perform their beliefs, fulfil their duties, and constitute public service of God: hence the collective name: 'liturgy.' However, how liturgy performs their beliefs is a critical concern for many churches; is it (a) adequate to their theological memory, (b) reflective of their collective vision, and (c) suitably adapted to their actual situation? (O1, Chapters 5 and 6 pose these questions.) O'Loughlin's work is valued by the churches because he addressed these three questions and in doing so provides a method to bridge the gulf between historical theology and modern community practice (O2).</p> <p>Since 2000 many of O'Loughlin's publications in the history of early Christian practice and thinking have centred on performance and perception of community rituals, especially surrounding the central gathering known as 'the Eucharist.' Originally an evening community meal it mutated into a token meal and eventually into an entirely token affair. (O1, chapters 2-4) His research has tracked the details of these changes and evaluated them in terms of their overall effect on Christian self-perception (O3). His research develops a method of historical critique which calls into question the centrality of later theological edifices and disputes which, not being at the core of the memory, are but accidental growths and distractions to the search for the roots of Christian worship. He argues for continuities with Jewish practice and a focus away from the elements towards prayer to the Father and the location of mystery and transformation within the community itself. This has particular significance for those groups</p>		

seeking to overcome historical divisions within Christianity, who seek new doctrinal frameworks coupled with liturgical change as a way forward (O4).

Since the 1960s many churches have sought to renew their liturgy by looking back to earlier forms and practices. O'Loughlin's research has offered the evidence to effect this. His findings justify changes of practice towards more equal eucharistic participation, use of a common loaf, and more radical eucharistic understandings of foot-washing. O'Loughlin's research focuses on the implicit theology inscribed in community practices: what is the significance of the early liturgical forms for practice today? (O5). This engagement with both origins and contemporary practice is relatively rare, but meets an expressed need within the churches, which makes O'Loughlin in high demand as an adviser and trainer. This demand is not only from professional clergy and musicians – although he propagates his research in journals aimed at these groups (O6) – but also from engaged local groups whose interest is that they participate regularly in liturgy and believe that they could 'do it better'. The importance of O'Loughlin's research is evidenced by his July 2020 appointment as Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy, the highest academic distinction in Ireland, this appointment being a response to his world-leading work on the historical origins and evolution of the liturgy and the eucharist – further underpinning the quality of his work (See: <https://www.ria.ie/news/membership/29-new-members-admitted>).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

(O1) *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: T&T Clark, 2015). ISBN: 9780567156051.

(O2) 'From a Damp Floor to a New Vision of Church: Footwashing as a Challenge to Liturgy and Discipleship', *Worship*, 88 (2014), 137-150, DOI: 10.1177/0021140016674277 196.

(O3) 'Normes et langages théologiques: L'exemple de l'Eucharistie', in Hélène Bricout ed., *Du bon usage des norms en liturgie: Approche théologique et spirituelle après Vatican II* (Paris: Les Éditions de Cerf, 2020), 201-224. ISBN: 9782204137331.

(O4) *Eating Together, Becoming One: Taking Up Pope Francis's Call to Theologians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2019). ISBN: 9780814684580. Winner of First Place in the 'Ecumenism or Interfaith Relations' category in the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada's 2020 Book Awards.

(O5) *The Rites and Wrongs of Liturgy* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018). ISBN: 9780814645635. This has been translated into Italian: *Riti Corretti: Perché celebrare bene conviene* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2020). ISBN: 9788839918789.

(O6) 'Sharing the Living Word: Looking at the Lectionary as it approaches its golden jubilee,' *Music and Liturgy*, 43 (2017), 8-13. <https://www.ssg.org.uk/music-liturgy-journal/>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

O'Loughlin has undertaken an extensive programme of engagement: 1) 28 **articles** in clergy and community publications in Europe, the USA and Australasia, (2) **YouTube** content with over 110,000 views, (3) three **radio** programmes, (4) over 100 **workshops** focused on putting liturgical change into practice. In an evaluation of 42 of these sessions, there was a total audience of 1691. Of 1110 who left feedback, the vast majority (85.59%) indicated that O'Loughlin's research developed their understanding of liturgy and would change future practice: 'Professor O'Loughlin's lecture **transformed** the way I will read aloud during the liturgy' (Suffolk, UK, 09.07.2017), 'Thought-provoking, thank you – I wouldn't have heard this anywhere else!' (Luton, UK, 21.05.2017) 'Liturgy will never be the **same again**.' (Ponsonby, NZ, 07.07.2017) (D, E).

With this strong foundation of dissemination, through follow-up work with individual groups O'Loughlin's research has led to substantial change in practices in churches across the denominations. Key impacts include:

Impacts on improved liturgical practice

O'Loughlin's research has enabled Christian communities to identify liturgical practice to improve, provided a historical method to justify change and renewed theological interpretations of these practices. This has improved understanding of the significance of the use of foodstuffs at the Eucharist, enriched the way sacred texts are read and the perception and performance of practices such as foot washing. The research has had impacts **on national Church structures** through dioceses and bishops who have introduced and amended clergy training, changed the performance of rituals (the use of foodstuffs, positioning of the congregation and the priest) and recovered the democratic and participatory nature of liturgy.

Nationally within the United Kingdom, O'Loughlin's findings have been translated into liturgical practice in 10 Catholic dioceses: Hexham and Newcastle, Northampton, Hallam, Nottingham, Southwark, Portsmouth, Menevia, Liverpool, Westminster and Leeds (**A, E**). Across these, the research has inspired renewed engagement with the origins of liturgical practice. For example, O'Loughlin's work fed into the teaching materials and practice of the Episcopal Vicar for Education and Formation in the **Diocese of Northampton**, responsible for Catholic Education across 43 schools and 75 parishes, enabling the church to better engage modern society. As a result, the Diocese of Northampton has seen changes to attitudes and thinking of clergy, educators and lay communities, having gained a '*deeper understanding of worship*' from O'Loughlin's eucharistic theology and used his ideas on participation to improve funerals and develop ways to include ashes in the requiem mass. (**A**). In the **Diocese of Nottingham**, the Director of Ongoing Formation & Support for Clergy states that '*his various publications have been continually within our reach*' and that '*years later his listeners which include the Bishop, priests, deacons and laypeople of the Diocese still report back to me with what they remember and how they are using his ideas in liturgy as well as historical theology which they incorporate in their homily*' (**A**). O'Loughlin's collaboration with the Diocese of Nottingham – in two conferences and three specialist training sessions (2017-2018) – has brought about changes to performance of preaching, deeper understanding of the purposes of the homily, how the homily affects continuity through the Mass, the uses of Eucharistic Prayers, the use of the scriptures, provided new ways in which priests and deacons interact with their congregations and encouraged additional theological study by clergy (**A**).

Internationally, O'Loughlin was invited to **Australia** and **New Zealand** in 2017. The success of a training series in the Diocese of Rockhampton led to an invitation to address all New Zealand bishops and liturgists in 2019. The key teachings were published in the Wellington Diocesan newspaper. Through these, O'Loughlin's research in early church practice has resulted in reinterpretation of and changes to how the diocese read their scriptures, and their aims in preaching. The **Catholic Bishop of Rockhampton** (Queensland) testifies that directly working with O'Loughlin has '*opened up a new world to our clergy*' with several engaging in further study as a direct result – '*the real gift of Dr Tom is the way he assists the students in learning and asking questions and developing the thirst in the student to read and research*'. To ensure sustainability of the change, on the diocese's request, two priests took up a course of Licentiate studies, to be followed by others once they have completed the courses. As a result of O'Loughlin's work with priests since 2017, the Diocese of Rockhampton has instituted a week of specialised 'formation' training on the liturgy for all their clergy each October drawing on the content and the historical theological method developed in O'Loughlin's events (**A**).

Changes at national and diocese levels have filtered down and have led to impacts at **community, assembly and parish levels**, with groups taking upon themselves to respond to O'Loughlin's findings. To support the change, O'Loughlin has worked with 43 communities from 6 countries through delivery of liturgy workshops, resulting in the uptake of reformed practices among church communities. O'Loughlin's research on the *Didache*, and O1 has impacted:

i. The Anglican **Benedictine Community of Mucknell Abbey**. The former Abbot has stated that O'Loughlin's *The Eucharist* 'opened up a whole fresh understanding of the essence of what we are doing'. His 2017 course marked 'a new [...] understanding and exploration of who we are and what we are doing each day as we meet to "make Eucharist"'. The current Abbot reports O'Loughlin's work inspired them to start a fortnightly study group so that the whole Community gains a deeper understanding of the *Didache*. (B).

ii. At a **Poor Clare Monastery**, his linkage of eucharist and foot-washing has 'led to new visions and ideas of what liturgy is all about and many new innovations in our own liturgical practices.' As a direct result, the Poor Clares have amended their Eucharistic service and Holy Week celebrations and are now much more open to ecumenical aspects of liturgical sharing. O'Loughlin's YouTube video series is used by the Abbess in her own teaching (B).

iii. O'Loughlin's arguments in favour of restoring the Eucharist as a meal (O1) have led the **Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion**, a society of evangelical churches in the UK and Sierra Leone, to institute communion meals. In the words of one Trustee, 'a re-reading of *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings*, is inspiring a significant change in the manner and form of taking Communion' at the **Mortimer West End Chapel**. In a tradition of liturgical practice reaching back to the 1780s the Eucharist was peripheral. In February 2017, for the first time, the community members took Communion as part of sharing a Sunday lunch, the start of a twelve meal 'building of community and tradition', directly inspired by O'Loughlin's research arguing against the separation of Eucharist and meal (B). They have now introduced a monthly community meal/Eucharist, enabled by O'Loughlin's attribution of mystery to community transformation rather than fetishized elements.

iv. O'Loughlin's research about the lost democratic, participatory nature of liturgy led to changes in parishes in the **Auckland Catholic Diocese** (NZ). O'Loughlin's work influenced the decision to redevelop the existing Parish infrastructure at **Papakura Parish Church** leading to a new worship facility being erected. As stated by the parish priest, 'our development plan has been the result in large part of Tom's influence.' (B) Having spoken with O'Loughlin in 2017, plans were finalised in 2019. Serving a Catholic population of 3000, the redevelopment alters the internal dynamics of the church building to stress equality and encourage active participation (G).

v. O'Loughlin's critical historical theology has given Catholic lay movements resources for their negotiations with the clerical hierarchy. Since 2012, O'Loughlin has worked closely with '**A Call to Action**' (ACTA), a UK Roman Catholic charity of 3,000 members that gives a voice to lay Catholics in dialogue with senior clergy. O'Loughlin's publications 'have been central to ACTA education' on issues such as the poor quality of Mass translation and liturgy. The research findings have enabled the ACTA National Leadership Team to be better prepared and display more confidence in their discussions with Catholic leadership about liturgy performance. Due to discussions on the 'future of the Church', the **Portsmouth ACTA** branch now seeks to emulate the *Didache* in the formation and use of small groups (C).

Impact on the curricula in universities and organisations overseeing clergy training.

Through incorporation of research (O 3,6) into curricula in six theological schools and through impacts on the strategies and creation of new cross-denominational partnerships between training providers, the work is impacting the liturgical practice of clergy and the assemblies they serve. O'Loughlin's research stands as key texts in the education and training of the next generation of clergy and religious leaders:

i. In **Europe**, since 2017 (O1) has been used extensively in the core teaching of the Liturgy at the **Anglican Church of Ireland Theological Institute**, directly influencing the education of 40 ordinands from 2017-2020 (F).

ii. The **Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki** lean heavily on O'Loughlin's research (O1) and YouTube series to support the **training of Bachelor and Masters students** of whom 40% (out of an annual cohort of 160) train for the **Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**. Courses influenced by O'Loughlin's outputs are 'Food and Religion' (running since 2017, approx. 30 UG students per year), 'Prayer and Worship' (running biennially since 2015 for 5-10 UG and MA students) and 'Contemporary Christian Worship' (a core module for ordinands). O'Loughlin's research forms the, '*basis for discussion of received norms and to present future directions for student essays and theses*'. His approach '*is not available in Finnish scholarship, and thus these texts become essential means to generate discussion and set the topics among a new international framework.*' (F)

iii. In the **United States**, O'Loughlin's publications underpin several courses at the multid denominational **Northeastern Seminary (Rochester, New York)**. *Eating Together* and *The Didache* (2010) are significant resources for Northeastern's 'Worship' course, which has taught over 90 students over several years (F).

iv. In **Australia** in 2018, *The Eucharist*, with its historical theology embedded in life and practice, formed the basis for a year of study with the South Australian Chapter of the **Australian Academy of Liturgy**. The Chapter (comprising representatives from the Roman Catholic, Uniting, Anglican and Lutheran churches) consider this work to be '*a rich treasure*' used to better theological understandings and consider current practice of Eucharistic activities (F). Through this organisation, the research has influenced building consensus across different denominations through common teaching practice.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Bishop & Diocese Testimonial Dossier confirming impacts on their practice and thinking
- B. Community & Parish Level Testimonial Dossier confirming influence on liturgical practice
- C. ACTA Testimonials confirming O'Loughlin's influence on their education programme
- D. Number of views of YouTube videos featuring Tom's research
- E. Feedback dossier from those who have taken part in liturgy workshops since Nov 2016
- F. Theological College Testimonials confirming impact on teaching content and practice
- G. Papakura Redevelopment Plans, outlining O'Loughlin's influence on the design of the church