

Do we need Liturgical Reforms?

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Since the Holy See is involved in liturgical reform, we naturally ought to assume that at least in the minds of the scholars and pastors who are engaged in it, the work is relevant. The details of this reform are obviously chosen for pastoral reasons. In other words the concern was definitely and decidedly one of the spiritual welfare of ordinary Catholics, not only of an élite of archaeologists, historians and those who use their missals with understanding and devotion. This pastoral concern is the one thing all liturgical reforms have in common. Damasus I was probably the pope who established the vernacular Latin, Gregory I remade the calendar and the music, Gregory VII stabilized the Franco-Roman form and Trent froze the best available text in its present form. Thus we must assume that the recent changes were supposed to be relevant to the spiritual growth of the average more or less instructed faithful. Of course, no one in his sane mind wanted all people at mass to hear the more subtle overtone of text and music with the same amount of appreciation as the mentally and spiritually mature and perspicacious. Popular devotion on its lower levels is not equipped to follow the gossamer strand of the word-composition to its finest ending in sheer contemplation. But there is a world of difference between a simple, untutored worshipper saying his rosary or reading his prayer book at mass and the man on the same level who is conscious that the texts and tunes are immediately addressed to him and his fellows in the crowd. As soon as we Catholics become aware of the fact that the Word of God in its liturgical setting is immediately addressed to us then we will understand that the Word is the living Lord standing before us. 'Do this for my memorial' also invites us to enter into the Upper Room for the Last Supper with Christ in his mystical totality, head and body.

According to most who have been active in bridging the gap between rite and mystery on one side and the devout in the pew on the other, there are several reasons why, outside of holy communion, the liturgy seems irrelevant to the devout and a bore to the uninitiated. The first is the foreign language which is one of the main barriers to creating a live and immediate contact between the mystery action and the man in the pew, the mystagogue and the myst. There is a need for the

vertical contact of life beyond our power. There is even greater relevancy for the horizontal contact from myst to fellow-myst in the mass as a banquet—which after all is not only needed for its integrity as a mystery but also as the visible form of the mystery of food and drink and the feasting brethren. I am afraid the *basse scholastique* of the pre-Reformation era and the polemics of the counter-Reformation have scarred Catholic thinking to a degree that the sacrificial aspects have driven out the *convivium*, at least in the professional literature, in preaching and in the posture of clergy and laity. And this is relevant for Christians and their spirituality. The more the liturgy becomes the dominant part of the spiritual lives of the faithful of all degrees of initiation the closer they come to the mystical body, to revelation, to a sense of fraternity and, not least, to contemplation and the incarnation of things spiritual and its counterpart—deification in the sense of Peter's two epistles. The unfortunate necessity to legislate attendance at mass at regular intervals under pain of grave matter has unwittingly and as a by-product created the climate where the love-feast became a bounden duty. Add to this the casuistry of theory and practice and the whole image of the mysteries has changed. The minimalists defend their case that mere attendance is all the Church legislates; the rigorists feel that if the faithful have the time they may as well attend a couple or a dozen masses a day for the sake of gathering merit. Unless the mass is made simple in gesture, grave in word, lucid in its constructive parts while the mystery is taken out of what should be translucent and self-explanatory, the whole rite becomes irrelevant. The mystical part in its high points—consecration, real presence, communion, the Church—is the ground of this mystery. It is not the prayers, the preparatory rites and the lessons nor their place nor even their language that makes the liturgy a mystery. All of them (seen as one) are pre-mystery and sacrament. To locate the mystery itself properly we will have to avoid the trap that swallowed Amalar and his innumerable successors in their abstruse allegorism. Only a people estranged from the mystery feel that they are facing irrelevancy. Details are unimportant, interpretation either historical or allegorical, to those hungering after justice. What does it matter if the Easter Vigil is celebrated in empty churches on a bright and sunny morning? What of it if the rites are overgrown and encrusted with ritual that is 'mysterious' in the popular meaning of the word? Aren't they the growth of centuries for the simple to watch and be edified by them while the true initiate cherishes them as one more witness of the Church visible through centuries where such things lose

themselves in the darkness of the past? We are not here bringing up the subject of the liturgy and the mystic souls that have passed through the purgative stage. Our problem is different. Some one has suggested that the reform now in process is some sort of a game played by *aficionados* of the liturgy, an orgy of historians restoring irrelevant details at the expense of the calm and undisturbedness of the bewildered God-seeking congregations. *On nous change la messe* is the title of a recent book by the French Dominican Roguet which betrays the pain of the uninformed layman. Conservative members of the intelligentsia are more perturbed by the new attitude demanded of them. They are upset and angry because, if things are done as they should be, their missal has become a book to read before mass, not while they make a valiant effort to read parallel with the celebrant at the altar, surrounded with protective silence, undismayed by their neighbours and their idiosyncrasies, communing in silence with God while meditating the texts in their missals. Their complaint is articulate and usually brought forth with undertones of anger and contempt for the 'liberals' whom they have to thank for these 'new' ideas. There is actually a malaise in Anglo-Saxon countries because they are dragged into a situation resulting from the apostasy in Mediterranean and Teutonic countries, who have low attendance at mass and are suspected of saddling with problems countries which are as yet quite healthy, at least to the naked eye. As the basic structure is being carefully adhered to and the changes are not radical at first sight, these people are all the more resentful of change. Had there been a complete modernization of the Catholic worship with the ingredients of post-tridentine spirituality and its theological emphases the changes might have been considered relevant. We could imagine the following: The mass opening with readings from the *Philothea* or Grignon de Montfort or Thomas of Kempen, followed by one of the litanies and a hymn; then the consecration without any offertory followed by a preparation for communion, which would consist of *feverinos* around gospels and epistles and a long silent post-communal meditation and thanksgiving. This 'liturgy' would, of course, be very flexible and adaptable to the individual parish and its pastor. It would also make the participants into one or the other form of Pentecostals, even with the creed intact, especially the more recent dogmas on our Lady. I suppose that when you have never been able to see the mass in its structure and subtly built-up climaxes you might not feel that you have been robbed of your greatest treasure of Word and sacrament through the above 'modern-eucharist'. Such a service

would also have destroyed the *Churchness* of the present liturgies of all rites, eastern and western. Moving further in this direction, we will have to face this: Why does not the Church ordain all practising Christians so that they can receive the sacrament *en famille* or even alone—no clergy, no buildings, no clerical red tape? The lack of support for such a Christianity in the scriptures might no longer seem the same defeating argument after the dogma of the Assumption. 'Drink ye all of this' is certainly a clear statement and yet theologians have proved that for practical reasons this institution is fulfilled as long as the celebrant drinks the chalice, in a way representing the *Ecclesia*. All this might have happened had the development not been stopped in 1570 by the freezing it underwent in our present *Missale Romanum*. It is clear that the communal aspect of salvation and of the life of the spirit has been neglected over the concern for the individual to a degree which tempts us to coin the term of 'post- or trans-sacramental' spirituality. In detail what are the relevant things in the liturgy reform? What makes the whole thing relevant to the soul that loves God?

Modern Catholics have inherited an attitude from the state of scholasticism at the turn of the sixteenth century which concerned itself with cause and effect in sacramental thinking. This left little room for the *mysterium* and the existential grasp of the analogical character of all things belonging to the 'unknowable' God. The holy eucharist became in the minds of the unsubtle the present Jesus to be adored and to receive as 'little white guest'. At least one of the popular hymns puts it in this way to the dismay of people with a sense of dignity and proportion. That communion is a banquet with our neighbours, that it is indivisibly connected with the Word (epistle and gospel, etc.), that it makes Christ as our Redeemer present—not *physice*, but *sacramentaliter*—that there is a world of difference between sacramental presence as distinguished from the physical—all these considerations are safeguards against a gross comprehension of the liturgy. Yet no signposts warn the Christian of our day against the trap set by ignorance and a lack of comprehension of the otherness of the sacramental world, a world reached only by faith, not by imagination and naturalistic concepts applied by over-eager piety short-circuiting complex strands of thought that should be left alone. May we refer the reader to an attentive reading of Anscar Vonier's *Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, or, if pressed for time, Dom Gommaire Laporta's *Eucharistic Piety* (*Ecl. Rev.*, Jan. 1929). The strong emphasis of deducted facets of the sacraments over their true symbolism and meaning cannot but warp the

whole frame of its structure. In this context it is indeed relevant what has been done by the liturgical movement of the reform, even in less important practical aspects like the altar's position and direction, the use of the same hosts for communion that were consecrated at mass, the posture of mind and body, the silence or response of the congregation and the very relevant question whether or not mother tongue or archaic languages should be used.

I very often have the impression that the antagonism against reform and change stems from the 'middle-brow' fringe, as much as from sheer inert minds and hearts. The hugging to your bosom of your translation of the altar missal, the isolation from the surrounding brothers and sisters so easily accomplished with a superb collection of prayers and lessons at your solitary disposal is a great hermitage to abide in, alone with the alone. This has always been the refuge of the Stoics, the wise and cultured who must endure the crowds around themselves. But is it what the Last Supper and the Acts suggest? Is the mystical body an organism built of interdependent and co-operating cells or members, or is it composed on non-communicative and independently juxtaposed *entia* that are only open 'at the top', like a cluster of grapes. 'Where there are two or three gathered in my name, I will be in the midst of them', if valid for prayer in common, assumes yet greater reality in sacramental union, in communion.

From here on the Christian should crave for sincerity, true meaningfulness and true spiritual proportion. Let us show this desire for truth in the liturgy by an example or two. Historical analysis, unravelling of greatly confused strands of thought, and comparison with older and clearer usage, convinced practically all liturgiologists and pastoral leaders that the present *fractio panis* is not the breaking of the host for communion, but the remnant of a purely ceremonial *fractio*, which was so prominent in the Gallican, Visigothic and Byzantine *proscomidia*. There is now little doubt left that the significance attributed to this quaint rite was again twofold. One was the symbolizing of the oneness and identity of the different masses. The bishop sent a *fermentum* (particle of his own host) to the pastors to drop into their chalices, while he dropped from one to several particles from his own previous eucharists into his own chalice. All this elaborate ritual signified the oneness of the masses in Christ's sacrifice. This elaborate routine became obscured in its significance and lingers on to this day. There was also the even later interpretation of a purely ceremonial reuniting of the two species (not affecting the sacramental reality), a sort of Resurrection

of Christ in the chalice. This was definitely something that could not have happened after the scholastic precisions had been applied to the body of eucharistic doctrine: no change made by man on the species can affect the essence of the sacrament.

This short excursion into a world of obsolete rites whose origin has laboriously to be investigated before it yields any meaning, which is not a fantastic allegorism concocted by arbitrary and often abstruse interpretations, may serve as one example why the pastors ought to be happy that Rome is anxious to free the worshipping Christian from unnecessary growths from periods in history when liturgy did not actually inform the minds of the divines and the people. All liturgists and pastors have high hopes to be able to take part in masses that are in a way self-explanatory in a not too distant future. Let us be modest in our hopes. But if the mystery of bread and wine, body and blood, death and victory will again be *the* mystery freed from satellites to be partaken in, celebrated in common and contemplated in images and imageless truths and realities then the central mystery will be the sun coursing in majesty and grandeur undiminished by competing and warped allegories.

Duplications and clusterings of ceremonies and wordy prayers obscure the simple outline of the mass. Two, nay three openings now compete with each other in the beginning of the mass: *Introitus*, *Judica* and *Asperges*. The offertory (the little canon) has all but stolen the sacrificial aspect of the Canon. Singing overlaps praying on a dozen and more occasions. Until recently, an unfortunate answer to a question proposed to the inquiry concerning the *Sanctus* split it in the middle and made of its second part a welcome to the present sacramental Christ, although it was previously the end of the Preface addressed to the Father. Until the new Easter Vigil made it clear what the 'odd' double opening of the hands after the *Oremus* was all about—namely, a moment of deep silence for private and individual prayer—private and personal prayers seemed to be non-existent in the liturgy. Now they are reinstated in solemn place and surrounding of great moment and dignity, before the celebrant intones the great Collect of the day. This is apparently a 'minor' detail to the non-liturgist, even if it puts a new face on the relation of public, formulated and vocal prayer versus the interior word of prayer in their 'polar' and sometimes antagonistic relationship. Silence does not so much belong to the Canon of the mass as it belongs to this position, for the Canon, at least parts of it, should be sung the way the Preface now is. Before we can even try to make the Church,

the Bible and our philosophy relevant to those without faith, we should at least present an uncluttered worship that is not lost in minute ritualism and odd and 'mysterious' details. The great mystery of Christ's atoning death and his resurrection for all men lives in the simple rite of the Last Supper and the Word. The comparative moderation with which the Roman rite proceeds, the strong content of scripture in it, its sobriety and gravity should of all the Christian rites commend it to modern man. The Frankish, Visigothic and the Eastern rites may be more poetic and dramatic. Even the loans Rome took from them still betray their non-Roman origin as, for instance, in the Candlemas antiphons and the Good Friday liturgy. People who describe themselves as agnostics because they are somehow shocked in their awe of their idea of God at the familiarity and carelessness of the believers are more often than not captivated by the notion of a God detached from the formulae and the divine algebra of our systematic theology. The symbolic character of the liturgy is too often just a statement of most believers who talk as if the presence of Christ were a natural one. This is more frequently and flagrantly visible in the popular attitude towards a tabernacle-centered cosmos they have created for themselves. Such inanities and misplaced emphases rob the great symbolism of its sweeping proportions.

Fr Charles Davis has written a remarkably perceptive article in the *Downside Review* (p. 93, 1961) on the apparent irrelevancy of faith and revelation to man in our days. It is as if religion had become a luxury and of small weight compared with the massive economic, political, technical forces that have been created by man who works in and with the forces of nature recently subdued by man. Now that man has penetrated space we still speak of heaven and hell with the terminology of a scholastic or patristic theologian and his well-ordered cosmos where there is an up and down, and do not hint of relocating these truths (with the exception of the prophet Teilhard de Chardin). If such books as the *Phenomenon of Man* have brought down all naive attempts of writing cosmology without eyes, then we need more and better books of this kind (wrong as their details may have been) We can't continue to live in the Aristotelian 'Great Clock' world. Something like the noosphere and point Omega, stripped of its shortcomings, has to be accepted as the divine goal of evolution. The agnostic if he isn't a braggart or a fool is a man who wonders about the realities we are so willing to try to sell him without showing more than a momentary concern which passes, and releases us into 'real life'.

Is liturgy still relevant or is it a game immature children play, maybe all the way through their long and wasted lives? What has the new Holy Week to say to man who travels in space and sits under the sword of Damocles of nuclear strike? Does it really matter to wait for his answer? Providence includes Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse Tung. What is their Christian significance? Is it possible to believe and make others believe that they are the Adversary incarnate, the Evil One in the Holy Place? Unless we enjoy being and remaining in a world where all the solutions are pat and the past is more powerful and real than 'waves of the future' we must face the problem or abdicate to form small islands of level ground while the rivers of history flow by. If the only answer is to outlast and outbeget this frightening torrent of totalitarian forces, it is not a very good and convincing answer although it may work just that way in some parts of the world. The complacent and inert always seem to win over the hot and bothered reformer and zealot in this world. In this struggle, even if a true persecution should strip the Church of all organization and partnership we need not look for features to play the power game, as our multiple organizations on all levels do now. They may all be gone and irrelevant to the living mystical body of Christ. The conception of God in the post-Christian and atomic world may then be cleansed of pre-Christian and cultural assumptions which flooded the minds and created a 'style' of Church with the edict of toleration of Constantine in 313 A.D. This event has always been regarded as decisive for the relation of the Church and the State. Only now, surrounded by all forms of totalitarian government, have we learned to look for new forms of existence as a Church. One of the most fit and tough growths is the sacramental world, clothed in the creations of liturgy. To get ready for the new era of penetration and infiltration without ostentation is that combination of the Word with the sacrament, called the mass. As the world dons this period of concentration, vigorous, loud and cruel in the world of Moscow, unnoticeable and subtle in the old society, we have to fall back (or at least be prepared to do so) upon the living liturgy. A well preserved relic of the past won't do. The liturgy not only is being, but has to be, reformed to bring its meaning to light. Irrelevancies have to be pruned away. It also has to be de-feudalized, as is evident in the many letters published and unpublished from Continental faithful from Spain to Poland, from Africa to South America. If we can't take seriously this reform, whose only defects are its piecemeal proceeding and its timidity, we have not understood the meaning of it all and its importance for the future.

Let us, for a moment, assume that the state of the liturgy in 1939 (or even before St Pius X) was the best and pastorally the only possible way of having any kind of liturgical worship. Let us also assume the dichotomy of an active and responsible clergy on one side and the inarticulate, obedient laity on the other. Not only would this be a complete misunderstanding of the Church, but a position of the laity running counter to the general stream of education, policy, society and freedom. The images created by the maximum engagement through the pericopes, the collects, the whole proper and ordinary would be missing and leave the minds and hearts of men and women a wasteland, starved and un nourished.

When it was realized under Pius XII that the devices created for a closer participation of a hierarchically organized body—like dialogue masses, Gregorian chant, individual use of translations of the texts used at the altar and in the choir loft—could not be brought in its present form to become a matter of engagement of the individual and the congregation in the sacred *commercium*, the Pope, who was well aware of the obstacles, was heard to say to a group of liturgiologists in September of 1953: 'We have done all we can with the present state of our liturgy. We have brought the congregations as close as we can to the altar. It is now our task to bring the altar to the people'. This meant that great reforms had to be made, to finish the prevalence of the irrelevant over the essentials. While it was possible, for the first vintage of liturgy, to play a game and to be more concerned with vestments, furnishings, private delight of aesthetes over the recondite beauty of the worship, than with content, this is no longer true. As a matter of fact the obstacles for a rebirth of the mysteries in the parishes now arise from the most unlikely source: those who have followed the mass with their translated or untranslated missals. They are happy and content with reading and meditating the beautiful texts, but they want no interference, not from the altar, nor from the pulpit, nor from the people in the pews. In the name of interiorness of prayer they want to be left alone with their printed texts. Were the mass a meditation, pure and sole, this vociferous and articulate group would, of course, be right. They do not want to merge with the present Church. They want to meet with the Church at its highest level: immediately with God and his chosen saints. At lower levels, diocesan and parochial, they feel imposed upon, especially as the execution of the liturgy, as we descend, becomes less of an aesthetic experience. We must remember that only a good choir alternating with the congregation can save the congre-

gational singing from becoming less than edifying. The remedy for the Lord's Supper—and I use this word with a purpose—being smudged and distorted is discipline, co-operation and planning. This planning is to be more emphasized than hitherto and is becoming a regular task for the clergy and the church musicians. The solution is certainly not flight and withdrawal. It never is in any other field. Why here?

To conclude we must say that anyone who has used the substitute for hierarchical participation, his or her missal, while waiting for the day of reform, but now refuses to lower himself to the level of an ordinary and untutored parish congregation, is giving a proof that he may be good at meditation, at handling the intricate rubrics, at spiritual concentration: the essence of the mass is however not private devotion, flight to the seventh heaven, but to have mercy and charity. Such an attitude betokens a lack of generosity. Instead of appearing half an hour in advance to read and meditate the day's mass so as to follow the mystery with keen attention, these souls have made a habit of superimposing their meditation at the Church's expense upon the great sacrifice of him with whom, in the Spirit, they worship their Father. Their problem is not the liturgy, but the divine virtue of charity.

Everybody who lived with great interest through the reforms during the two decades behind us admits that in countries where the liturgical movement was not understood by the clergy there was an ill-conditioned and unprepared laity. In a few places the hierarchy stepped in and helped to explain the situation, carefully guiding and leading their flock into Canaan. But this was not so in the majority of places. While it seems to be obvious that poor psychology made the changeover unnecessarily difficult, much could have been avoided even at that late date. One wonders how the sullen would have reacted if all this had been preceded by letting the people in first and make the other adjustments take their logical place. Well, what is done is done. The duty of the intellectuals and the mystics now is to forget their grudge and to help the people of God to feel more at home than ever before.