

ROMANO GUARDINI AND THE LITURGICAL
MOVEMENT

THE Liturgical Movement, maintains Guardini, was born, not made. It came apparently into existence from a universally expressed desire for a life more fully and symbolically Catholic.

From whatever sources this movement sprang it is certain that in Romano Guardini it found its most able interpreter. In France, Germany and elsewhere this liturgical revival coincided exactly with the publication and translation of Guardini's *Sinn der Kirche* and *Geist der Liturgie*.

Perhaps a certain parallel may be found between the rebirth of metaphysics and the liturgical revival. Both movements have the same foundations, both spring from the need of some absolute order, and both are heralded as an escape from individualism.

Guardini shows how the liturgy, by incorporating all revealed truth, insists on the existence of an established order. Through collective prayer it offers an escape from the individualism of the times.

It is as an antidote to the spirit of the times that Guardini defends the liturgy. He shows how it is an antidote not only in the sense of renewing the bond between soul and body, but also by re-establishing the bond that should exist between man and all those things by which he is surrounded.

The liturgy takes man as a whole, body and soul, the soul not only animating, but also expressing itself through the body. Guardini takes the liturgy as a means of re-establishing the link which ought to exist between the internal and external, between soul and body; this link which since the Middle Ages has been always loosening. The conception of man as a whole, a being both spiritual and corporal, has, according to Guardini, been lost. Man has on the one hand been exalted as a being of pure intellect (*Geist*), or on the other hand has come to be regarded as a piece of mere animal mechanism. The one view misunderstands his nature, the other denies his soul. The Middle Ages (which

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developed the liturgy) understood man's true nature, that of a being both spiritual and corporal, and gave expression in the liturgy to both sides of his nature. Those were ages when the spiritual translated itself naturally into the visible and corporeal. The architecture, the art, the manners and customs of the Middle Ages reveal this fact.

Guardini shows further how the liturgy is an antidote to the times, not only by renewing the bond between soul and body, but also by establishing a link between man and his surroundings. The modern man is apt to lose himself in the immensity of his surroundings, an immensity which transcends his outlook. The effect of the cosmos is strange to him, even hostile; he longs for a world made more to his own measure, longs for a world bound up in some vital fashion with his own life; he longs in fact for a human world which he could really inhabit. The Church offers him such a world, and the liturgy can speak to him with the voice of the Church.

But to come to the more immediate object of the liturgy, which is prayer, the world war brought home to believers, even sometimes to unbelievers, the need of prayer. It brought home also, in a new manner, the fact of the Church, and of the immense brotherhood of the faithful united in work and suffering. "Not *I*, but *we* must pray—we of the brotherhood of the faith, must pray together in the Church's voice." The liturgical movement sprang up because of this collective need. It offered also a release from the subjectivism which had influenced all thought, even religious thought, and it was felt as an escape from the utilitarianism of the times. Liturgical rather than individual prayer, the Catholic idea of community as opposed to the Protestant idea of the individual: liturgical prayer which recognizes man not only as an individual, but also as a social being.

"But," to quote the late Abbot of Maria Laach, Dom Herwegen, one of the first inspirers of the liturgical movement, "man had forgotten how to pray. He had to find again the way to prayer. He had to learn that true prayer is the prayer of the Church, that the liturgy is the perpetual bridge between the eternal and the created."

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Guardini not only defines the spirit of the liturgy, he attempts to make it accessible; but he does not overlook the fact that it is opposed to certain modern habits of thought. It is precisely in this opposition that he sees its remedial possibilities. Built up by thought, laden with dogma, appealing to the intellectual rather than to the emotional, opposed to sensationalism, the liturgy is not only a *lex orandi*, but also a *lex credendi*. The need of the emotional in prayer may be chilled by the liturgy, individualism and the aristocratic sense may be wounded, but it is just in these things that Guardini sees its salutary influence. Because the liturgy is collective prayer and calls upon us to go out of ourselves and to embrace the needs of all men, it is notably useful in an age given over to individualism. Guardini points out, moreover, that collective prayer could not be fruitful if based only upon certain phases of revealed truth; it must necessarily incorporate the plenitude of revealed truth, and to this end must be dominated by doctrine. In his view the aim of the liturgy is not individual worship, is not edification or even internal formation, or spiritual awakening, it is the union of a believing community, the public cult of the Church, in which the unit is lost in the whole.

Guardini further insists that the liturgy is the religious expression of culture, that "without culture religion cannot endure." Perhaps the whole aim of his writing is to show the need of culture (as opposed to civilization). He shows how the liturgy caught and transformed the elements of culture, all that expressed the whole man. In one place he calls upon us to compare a town of the Middle Ages, its architecture, its art, its symbolism, its morals and customs, with a modern town which on the one hand makes a pretence of intellectual appeal but offers only the geometrical, and is on the other hand penetrated by a materialism in which even the human is lacking. As Guardini says, men have lost the capacity for seeing or hearing, they can only learn mechanically, and in consequence culture is disappearing, giving place to mechanism, which is the beginning of barbarism.

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Guardini's ideas are original and are always given in a form that appeals. His reasoning is never dry, and he never insists on definite results. He addresses his reader soul to soul, apparently without thought of making literature, which he nevertheless succeeds in making. Among all the Catholic writers of to-day, and they are many, he is perhaps the most interesting. A philosopher, an artist, a stylist, he unites to a philosophic mind the invaluable assets of literary perfection and personal charm. Born in Italy and with Italian blood in his veins, educated in Germany, and of German nationality, he unites the qualities of both North and South. To the speculative leanings of the North he unites a Southern classicism of form. His charm as a writer lies in this union of deeper thought with perfect literary expression. It is this probably which has given him such wide appeal, and made it possible for him to bring home Catholic thought to many who, if not attracted by literary excellence, would not have occupied themselves with the Catholic outlook.

To hear Guardini lecture is a literary experience, it is to have been brought nearer to the fundamental ideas of culture. He makes war on dead words, on journalistic expressions, on clichés that have lost their meaning. He has studied the power of words until he can make them new, vivid, vital—a clear medium to convey his thought, and his thought is generally worth conveying. "Words are something more than the signs of this sad code that our language has become. Words are living bodies, made of flesh, in which blood flows. We have ceased to recognize the natural and primitive dignity of words, and the degradation into which they have fallen. And to-day gestures are no more respected than words. We use the shadows of gestures in the same way that we use phantom words."

Guardini was called, several years ago, to fill the chair of Catholic "Lebensanschauung" in the very Protestant, perhaps we might say very pagan, University of Berlin. This was a rare honour for a Catholic priest, the more so as the post had been, so to speak, created for him. This office of university professor gave Guardini an influence which he could not otherwise have had. As a result of this influence

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he founded a Catholic Youth Movement in Germany, which was closely allied to the liturgical revival. The liturgy appeals in general to the youth of to-day. When they can come together to pray, they pray more willingly; when they can sing the Mass, or say parts of it with the priest—as is the custom now with many student groups—they enter more readily into the spirit of the holy sacrifice. Intensely modern, Guardini knows how to meet youth on its own ground. He recognizes that the young of to-day are animated by a desire of finding a path to the real, that they want to look things in the face and do away with phantoms and shadows. He knows that they have enough of false representations, of verbal fog, of the wrapping up of life's realities; that they want to face and understand life, whatever its crudities may be.

The keynote of Guardini's message to the young is reflection. Every action being grave, reflection before each action is necessary. He understands the anxiety and suffering that underlies the so-called brutality of the youth of to-day, knows that these young savages often undergo soul torture. They have broken with a worn-out culture but they cannot renounce joy. Their turning away from society has not brought them what they expected. Thrown back upon themselves and isolated, they seek a refuge in religion. The liturgy, by not insisting upon emotions which they cannot feel, comes to them as a solution of the difficulty of prayer.

A master of intuitive psychology, Guardini understands the young, and by a gift of sympathy he wins their hearts. He knows the struggles, deceptions, difficulties, that encompass the young in the modern world, and from the vantage ground of faith and clear philosophic outlook he can teach and direct. Acting rather as a friend and adviser than as a professor, he speaks to his students in a language they can understand, and in a language so beautiful that his hearers become his admirers. Guardini knows how to lend colour to the veriest abstraction, and to make philosophy vibrant with new life. Avoiding all forms that are worn out and stereotyped, he is not only a fascinating lecturer but also one of the finest writers of modern Germany. Among his

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works are the following: *Vom Geist der Liturgie, Vom Sinn der Kirche*; this book made a deep impression on many outside the Church, and was perhaps the indirect cause of the conversion of Gertrude von Le Fort; *Neue Jugend und katholischer Geist, Aus einem Jugendreich*; these latter are the theory and expression of the youth movement; *Von heiligen Zeichen, Das Gute, das Gewissen und die Sammlung, Gegensatz*. This last is the deepest and considered the most remarkable of Guardini's works, the one in which he has given expression to his own philosophy. *Wille und Wahrheit*, lately published, has been highly criticized. Many of Guardini's works have been translated into French, and are much appreciated in France, but as far as I know only *Geist der Liturgie (Spirit of the Liturgy)*, *Vom Sinn der Kirche (The Church and the Catholic)*, two fragments from *Das Gute das Gewissen und die Sammlung*, and a *Way of the Cross*, have been done into English.

Apart from the liturgical movement which owed, if not its origin, at least much of its development to Guardini's writing and influence, his life has been rich in intellectual and human activity. In Schloss Rothenfels, the centre of the youth movement, Guardini with Quickborn—whose conversion was perhaps due to Guardini—have established a house of retreat, a centre for spiritual and intellectual renewal, where many foregather, and where Guardini's disciples can always find their master. Keeping aloof from politics, he has avoided the penalties of the new regime in Germany, and is able in spite of the times to continue his work and to exercise his influence.

Guardini celebrated, on the 17th of February this year, his fiftieth birthday, and received congratulations from all parts of the world. On this occasion even the German Catholic papers, silenced and crushed as they are at present, ventured to sing his praises. Guardini will celebrate also this year his jubilee as a priest.

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