

## **LITURGICAL STUDIES AND LITURGICAL RENEWAL**

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Springtime fittingly describes the liturgical renewal before, during, and the twenty or so years after Vatican II. Firmly grounded on historical research, theological investigation, and pastoral consciousness, the framers of the postconciliar liturgy set out to implement the decisions of the Council. Across the globe local churches experienced the flowering of liturgical worship. The noble simplicity of the revised rites and the use of the vernacular helped immensely to promote full, intelligent, active participation, which the Council had declared as the primary aim of the liturgical reform.

But even before we could, with satisfaction, gather the flowers and harvest the fruits of summer, a cold wind has begun to blow on the face of the postconciliar reform. The autumn leaves are starting to fall. No less than the papal master of ceremonies, Msgr. Guido Marini, announced on January 6, 2010 that there is need for a new reform of the liturgy. He intimated that the postconciliar experts did not grasp fully the meaning and intention of the liturgy constitution, which they had drafted and presented to the council fathers. He claimed that as a result, the postconciliar reform has “not always in its practical implementation found a timely and happy fulfilment.”

What are the possible implications of a reform of the postconciliar reform? What remedy does it offer for a reform that according to some Catholics has gone bad? What agenda does it put forward so that liturgical worship could be more reverent and prayerful?

The agenda is, to all appearance, an attempt to put the clock back half a century. It seems to conveniently forget that since Vatican II, the Church has been marching with the times, acknowledging the changes in social and religious culture, and adopting new pastoral strategies. Will Latinised English make the liturgy more awesome? It will certainly sound mysterious, but will it be more prayerful? Will the silent recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer, preferably in Latin, evoke more vividly the Last Supper of Jesus? Is receiving Holy Communion on one's knees and on the tongue more reverent than receiving it standing and in the hand? Will the priestly role of mediation be reinforced by praying at the altar with the back to the assembly?

The Constitution on the Liturgy (SC 21) wisely requires that the revision of any part of the liturgy should be preceded by a careful theological, historical, and pastoral investigation. This conciliar norm wishes to safeguard both the doctrinal content and the cultural form of the liturgy. To this end the study of liturgy should have due regard for its historical, theological, and cultural elements. In this way we will not dismiss too

readily the ancient prayers and rites of the liturgy on grounds that they belong to another culture and age. Such an iconoclastic attitude can indeed impoverish the theology of the liturgy. We know that many of these ancient forms are rich in doctrine and spirituality.

A serious study of liturgy will likewise neutralize the liturgical romanticism and allegorism that holds some sectors of the postconciliar Church. The indiscriminate revival of Latin and Gregorian chant, for example, indicates that some people have not followed the historical process. It is true that the Liturgy Constitution (SC 36 and 116), given the peculiar circumstances surrounding the Council, claims them as distinctive elements of the Roman liturgy. It is true that Latin and Gregorian chant still claim their rightful place in the liturgy. But to recall them as the ordinary, normal language and song of worship in parishes seems to overlook the conciliar principle of intelligent participation. The Church of Rome might have delayed the use of the vernacular, but it is part of her earlier tradition to adopt contemporary language in order to foster active participation. To revive Latin as the daily language of the liturgy, regardless of whether or not the presider and the assembly can follow the readings and prayers, disclaims "sound tradition" and obstructs what the Constitution (SC 23) calls "legitimate progress."

Vatican II's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* makes a significant statement about the role played by culture in the life and mission of the Church. In art. 58 it declares: "The Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilised the resources of different cultures in her preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in the various aspects of the life of the faithful." In the course of two thousand years the Church has been integrating the cultural resources of every nation in order to evangelize, to theologize, and to celebrate in the liturgy the mystery of her faith.

The writings of scholars like A. Baumstark, E. Bishop, G. Dix, L. Duchesne, J. Jungmann, and M. Righetti, among several others, drew attention to the cultural underpinning of Christian worship. Thanks to their scholarship, we can now affirm that Christian worship, both in language and rites, is so inextricably tied to culture that it is not possible to study it, much less celebrate it, outside the cultural context. This cultural consciousness engendered a new approach to the study of liturgy. Liturgical rites and symbols that once upon a time had been interpreted from a purely allegorical perspective began to be explained as historical and cultural realities.

Neglecting the study of liturgy in its historical and cultural realities can result in theological mishaps. When infant confirmation became the normal practice after the sixth century, the kiss of peace that the bishop gave to the newly confirmed adult was, for some reason, revised to a slight fatherly pat on the cheek of the child. By the thirteenth century in France and Germany the gesture had evolved into a slap similar to what a man received when he was vested as a knight. Consequently confirmation wound up as the sacrament that enlisted children as soldiers of Christ. The passage

from kiss to slap with the shift of emphasis from the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit to a military sacrament is one of the misfortunes of sacramental theology.

The historical and cultural approach to the liturgy had a strong impact on the shaping of the Constitution on the Liturgy. The council addressed the issue of liturgical renewal in the light, not only of theology and pastoral concern, but also of culture. Arts. 34, 37-40, 50, and the entire chapter on sacraments and sacramentals as well as the chapters on music and liturgical furnishings dwell on the relationship between liturgy and culture. Art. 34 is a good example. Although it does not explicitly say "Roman culture," it names its patterns when it says: "The rites should be marked by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions." It describes the classical form of liturgy that integrated Roman sobriety and practical sense. The Council envisioned a type of liturgy that was marked by noble simplicity and clarity. It wanted a liturgy that the people could easily follow. In sharp contrast is the attempt to revive, at the expense of active participation, the medieval usage that was espoused by the Tridentine rite and to retrieve eagerly the liturgical paraphernalia that had been deposited in museums as historical artifacts.

According to the Liturgy Constitution the study of liturgy has three chief orientations, namely theological, historical, and pastoral. They often overlap and are, in any case, mutually inclusive. The theology of the liturgy is drawn best from the liturgical books, namely the prayers, readings, and introductory notes. The famous axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the rule of prayer is the rule of faith) is enshrined in the liturgical books of the Church. Being catechetical and doctrinal in nature, the liturgy has an amazing capacity to explain to us what it is all about. Theologizing about liturgy apart from the liturgical books could become an exercise in theological hallucination. At best, it encourages the allegorical understanding of the liturgy, which incidentally was a favorite pastime of the clergy during the Middle Ages.

The aim of history, on the other hand, is to uncover the circumstances and factors that led to the theological thinking on the liturgy and the Church's liturgical discipline. In this connection we affirm that *historia docet*. History is a teacher that points out models to be imitated and warns about mistakes to be avoided. The study of history is not for archeological interest only, but also for a better understanding of the process of ritual development. We know that the revision of liturgical books after the Council was supported by solid historical data. Might not the absence of a historical mind frame be one reason why we still witness the tenacity to hold fast to liturgical forms discarded by the conciliar reform, especially on the part of conservative movements that challenge the postconciliar liturgy, if not the conciliar decision? History is liberating, but alas those who do not learn from it are indeed "bound to repeat its mistakes."

Lastly, pastoral liturgy is grounded in history or sound liturgical tradition, in the solid theology of the liturgy, and in what the Constitution (SC 23) calls "the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and from indults conceded to various places." Students of liturgy should be aware of recent developments, including recent documents from the Congregation for Divine Worship that are becoming increasingly

perplexing. Students should be equipped with a critical mind that allows them to weigh the theological, historical, and pastoral value of new norms and directives, though always in the spirit of ecclesial obedience.

Everything in history has its own justification, though not necessarily a lasting and universal value. Not every text in the liturgical books, not every rite and symbol from the past, and not every feast in the calendar has perennial significance for the life of the Church. The reform of the Roman missal wanted by the Constitution (SC 50) eliminated much of the medieval textual and ritual accretions that only served to blur the meaning and purpose of the Mass. Some prayer formulas, though venerable in age, needed to be modified in order to be more contemporary. The ill-fated Instruction "Comme le prévoit" of 1969 admits that "sometimes the meaning of a text can no longer be understood, either because it is contrary to modern Christian ideas (as in *terrena despicere* or *ut inimicos sanctae Ecclesiae humiliare digneris*) or because it has less relevance today (as in some phrases intended to combat Arianism) or because it no longer expresses the true original meaning as in some obsolete forms of Lenten penance." The Instruction was the handbook for liturgical translation in the Church until the appearance of *Liturgiam authenticam* in 2001.

The student should know how to critique liturgical developments in the light of Vatican II's liturgical principles, like the central position of the paschal mystery, the place of God's word, active participation with all this implies (use of the vernacular, congregational singing, lay ministry), and the ecclesial dimension of the sacraments and sacramentals. These constitute the guiding principles to decide whether things are liturgically acceptable or not.

Culture plays a crucial role in the study of liturgy, if such a study is to serve the cause of Vatican II's liturgical reform. Students of liturgy are required to own a fair amount of sensitivity to the cultural components of the liturgy and to their local culture and traditions. Familiarity with the notion of culture is a prerequisite to the study of liturgy. Culture in this context can be defined in terms of its values, patterns, and institutions. Time constraint does not allow us to address here these elements of culture. We cannot underrate the place and role of culture in the liturgy.

It is regrettable that today the word "inculturation" is spoken in some Church quarters in whispers and muffled voice. In reality the Liturgy Constitution devotes four long articles to it (arts.37-40). Although recent documents coming from Rome acknowledges inculturation, their definition of it as formal correspondence rather than dynamic equivalence effectively dismisses it. Inculturation by definition uses dynamic equivalence to re-translate the liturgical books in the historical, socio-cultural, and religious situation of the local Church. Of course, if not done according to rules, dynamic equivalence can be doctrinally risky. Formal correspondence, on the other hand, is considered doctrinally safe, because it is a word-for-word translation, but the result, such as the Latinised English prayers, misses the target of intelligibility and is on the whole linguistically awkward and clumsy.

Have autumn and winter prematurely settled in the liturgical landscape of Vatican II? After over four decades of conciliar reform the Church is now experiencing the cold chill of winter brought about by contrasting ideas of what the liturgy is and how it should be celebrated. Obviously this kind of tension could be a healthy sign that the interest in the liturgy has not abated. However, after the Council we are not free to propound our views on what the liturgy is all about outside the principles it has established firmly in the Constitution on the Liturgy. There are surely instances of postconciliar implementation that are debatable, but we should be careful to distinguish them from the conciliar principles, especially the full, active participation of all God's people in the liturgy.

The foregoing reflections aimed to pinpoint the cause of the malaise. There are groups, and their number grows with each passing day, that move with decisive step toward the rightist view of things. Any change in the liturgy causes irritation, if not outright disenchantment with the reform. Often they find refuge in preconciliar forms, which they revive as quickly as they discard the new. This paper tried to trace the cause, which seems to be the absence of an historical and cultural approach to the liturgy or, in a word, the inability to fuse together the two basic concepts of Vatican II's liturgical renewal, namely: sound tradition and legitimate progress.

Sound tradition and legitimate progress are the two key phrases that perfectly express the program of liturgical reform envisaged by Vatican II. Progress is built on tradition, while tradition sustains and critiques progress. It is necessary for the students of liturgy to review history, study the theology of the liturgy, be familiar with culture, and be imbued with pastoral zeal for the Church. One lesson we learn from history is that Rome was not built in a day, and that it took almost four hundred years for the Roman Church to develop its own liturgy. The long and short of it is that liturgical reform requires serious academic work, not mere romantic attachments to the past that close the eyes to the reality of the present time. The drive for legitimate progress makes us run toward the realisation of Vatican II's liturgical reform, but we should not run as if we did not carry on our shoulders the weight, both heavy and precious, of sound tradition. Liturgical reform is both sound tradition and legitimate progress, not sound tradition alone, but legitimate progress as well.

*That in all things God may be glorified.*