

I. Liturgy Forty Years after the Council

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It must be difficult to imagine, for those who have not experienced it for themselves, just how much liturgical praxis has changed in less than half a century. The evolution which has taken place in the last thirty years is barely perceptible nowadays since the new liturgical model is considered evident practically everywhere. Such a situation is certainly gratifying but does it mean that the profound intentions of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* have thereby been realized? Perhaps now is the appropriate moment for an evaluation.

It is evident that the last half century has brought about a major change in the relationship between the minister and the people in the liturgy. The situation might be roughly stated as follows: prior to the liturgical reforms the distance between the minister and the people was clearly designated. This was even given material expression in the ordering of church buildings: the distinct choir area reserved to the priest, the altar oriented to the East, priest and people separated by a communion rail. Even more questionable than the features of church architecture was the parallel configuration of the celebration: it being frequently the case that the priest celebrated the official liturgy while at one and the same time the people set about their personal devotions. The use of Latin, of course, had a significant role to play in this parallel configuration.

The consequence of all this was the fact that the liturgy came to be considered untouchable, an entity regulated by rubrics to be performed with great obedience and respect. Liturgy was simply a given, and a good liturgist was seen for the most part as an observant performer. The people assisted, of course, but took little or no part in the liturgy itself.

<H3Active participation

From its very beginnings, the aim of the liturgical movement, which originated in Belgium in 1909, was to close the gap between the official liturgy of the priest and that of the people. The term 'active participation' was born out of this movement and has since become part of our common usage. It became a key term in the liturgical constitution of Vatican II. Active participation was first promoted through the circulation of the People's Missals which contained the Sunday liturgy: the faithful were at least able to follow along. Before long, however, a desire for more than just following in the book emerged: people wanted to participate and join in. Vatican II satisfied this desire by introducing the use of the vernacular, by simplifying liturgical symbolism to make it more transparent, by returning to the praxis of the early church and dropping elements which had later come to overshadow the essentials, and by a correct distribution of roles in the service of the liturgy. The result was a far greater involvement of the people, even to the very heart of the liturgy.

II. From rubricism to manipulation

The active involvement of the people in the liturgy is, of course, an unparalleled gift from the Council to the People of God. As with every worthy reform, however, there is a shadow side. Active participation in the liturgy, preparing together, concern to get as close as possible to the culture and sensitivity of the faithful can lead imperceptibly to a sort of taking possession

of the liturgy. Participation and mutual celebration can lead to a subtle form of manipulation. In such an event the liturgy is not only set free of its untouchable quality--which in itself is not a bad thing--but it becomes in a sense the property of those who celebrate, a terrain given over to their "creativity." Those who serve the liturgy--both priests and laity--become its "owners." In some cases this can even lead to a sort of liturgical "coup" in which the sacred is eliminated, the language trivialized and the cult turned into a social event. In a word, the real subject of the liturgy is no longer the Christ who through the Spirit worships the Father and sanctifies the people in a symbolic act. The real subject is the human person or the celebrating community. The exaggerated emphasis from before the 1950's on discipline, obedience, fidelity to the rubrics, the reception and entering of a pre-existent entity is replaced by self-will and by the elimination of every sense of mystery in the liturgy. In this case the liturgy is no longer "leit-ourgia": the work of the people and for the people with respect to their relationship with God, it becomes a purely human activity.

Fortunately, the trend we have outlined is not universal. Nevertheless, any attempt to evaluate liturgical praxis in our time would be wrong to ignore it.

III. The liturgy is beyond us

There is a liturgical ground rule which runs as follows: the liturgy is first "God's work on us" before being our work on God. Liturgy is datum or prior given in its very essence: it is beyond us and has already existed for a long time, long before we could participate in it. The acting subject of the liturgy is the risen Christ: He is the first and only High Priest, the only one who is competent to bring worship to God and to sanctify the people. This is not only an abstract theological truth: it must become evident and visible in the liturgy. The core of the liturgy is already given in the Lord's acts of institution. This does not mean that the individual and the celebrating community are neither capable nor permitted to make a creative contribution. The community is creative, but it is not an "instance of creation." Otherwise the liturgy would no longer be the epiphany of the Christian mysteries through the service of the Church, the continuation of his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, the "incarnation" of a divine project in history and in the world of human persons via sacred symbols. In such a situation the liturgy would become nothing more than the community celebrating itself.

The liturgy "pre-exists": the celebrating community enters into it as into a pre-established, divine and spiritual architecture. To a certain degree this is also determined by the historical location of Christ and his sacred mysteries. The Eucharist as such is not a "religious meal" but rather the making present of a particular meal: that of Christ with his disciples on the night before he suffered. So, we are not creators, we are servants and guardians of the mysteries. We do not own them nor did we author them.

IV. The fundamental attitude of the 'homo liturgicus'

This entails that the fundamental attitude of the "homo liturgicus"--both individually and collectively--is one of receptivity, readiness to listen, self-giving and self-relativizing. It is the attitude of faith and of faithful obedience. It is not because a particular caricature of this attitude of obedience led at one time to slavish and nonsensical dressage and rubricism, that the sense of "entering in to what transcends us" has to be so diminished.

The “homo liturgicus” does not manipulate, nor is his or her action restricted to self-expression or auto-realization. It is an attitude of orientation towards God, readiness to listen, obedience, grateful reception, wonder, adoration and praise. It is an attitude of listening and seeing, of what Guardini called “contemplating,” an attitude so alien to the “homo faber” in many of us.

In short, the fundamental attitude of the “homo liturgicus” is none other than an attitude of prayer, of handing ourselves over to God and letting his will be done in us.

It should not surprise us, then, that in a period of history like our own, with its active intervention in everyday reality and its submission of that reality to our scientific thinking and our technological expertise, it will be particularly difficult to be genuinely liturgically-minded. The “contemplative” dimension of the human person is no longer evident these days. This being the case, the core of the liturgy is even less evident.

Active participation, therefore, has to be situated within this “contemplative” attitude, in which case it must also bear the particular characteristics of such an attitude.

V. The incomprehensibility of the liturgy

One of the primary concerns of Vatican II and of the Church is and remains that the liturgy be understood by the celebrating community. Every reform proposed by the Constitution is rooted in that concern. “Understand what you do” is a basic demand of everything we do, including what we do in the liturgy.

The incomprehensibility of the liturgy was blamed, in the first place, on language. Immediately after the introduction of the vernacular, however, it became apparent that it had to do with more than just language usage: the content of the liturgy itself was equally unfamiliar.

The liturgy, of course, is almost entirely structured on the bible. It is said that the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament is particularly unfamiliar to us. Everything takes place in an agrarian context which barely applies nowadays in many parts of the world. At the same time, the biblical texts are rooted in a rural culture, and a peculiarly Mediterranean one at that. Many images, such as shepherds, flocks or water wells are no longer part of the day to day vista of the modern city dweller. In other words, the bible uses a language from a bygone era.

The non-biblical texts in the liturgy are also strange, however. The Latin collects with their succinct and metrical structure are simply un-translatable, not so much because the words cannot be transposed into a modern language but because the mentality and culture from which they stem has disappeared. A great many texts, when detached from their musical setting, end up seeming extremely archaic; think, for example, of the *Salve Regina* and the *Dies Irae* or even the ordinary sung Gregorian Introids and Communion Antiphons leaving aside the archaic image of God which such texts maintain (the God who sleeps, the God of wrath etc.)

Certain symbols--although secondary--no longer seem to function: the drop of water in the chalice, mixing a particle of the host with the wine, the *lavabo*, the washing of the feet. One frequently hears reproaches such as “old fashioned,” “passé,” “medieval” and “monastic.”

VI. Abbreviate or eliminate?

People often opt for a short term solution, which barely touches on the real problem. In the case of the liturgy certain terms were replaced with other more understandable terms. There are biblical terms, however, which cannot be replaced. What do we do, for example, with words like "resurrection," "Easter," "Eucharist," "metanoia," "sin"? They are part of a sort of biblical and liturgical "mother tongue" which simply cannot be replaced. They have to be learned. It is hard to imagine an orthodox Jew using nowadays a different term for "shabbat" or "pesach."

Certain biblical images are, indeed, barely perceptible in our modern urban culture. The sight of shepherds and flocks is no longer an every day occurrence. Does this mean, however, that such images are no longer comprehensible in themselves? Is it because no one has ever met a seraph that the metaphorical power of this angelic messenger no longer speaks to us? Half of the poetry ever written makes use of images and terms which are not part of the daily life and environment of the reader. A great many symbols from medieval German culture were taken up in the Roman Pontifical.

People sometimes opt for alternative, poetic texts, especially for weddings and baptisms. Leaving aside the fact that there is a profound theological distinction to be made between an aesthetically valuable text and a biblical text, it is also true that many such texts belong to an even more limited culture than the bible which, it would appear, possesses a much greater universality.

The remedy employed in most cases often does not help. Most of the time it is limited to questions such as: "What can we drop?" "How can we abbreviate?" "What would function better to express what is going on in our lives as individuals and as a community?" Is the latter question justified, however? What precisely do we have to say in the first instance? What is going on in our lives? Or what God is saying to us? In a manner, of course, which we can understand.

There appears to be only one solution: if the liturgy is not simply a structuring of common human religiosity, but rather the epiphany of God in human history (from Abraham to Christ), then we cannot avoid the need for catechesis and initiation. Liturgy demands schooling because it is both proclamation and celebration of mysteries, mysteries which have occurred in the history of Judaism and Christianity.

VII. What is understanding?

What exactly is understanding? It is evident that if the liturgy is the epiphany of God's dealings with his Church then the deepest core or heart of the liturgy will never completely be open to our grasp. There is indeed a hard core in the liturgy--the mystery--which is ungraspable. One can only enter into it in faith.

There is more to say about understanding, however. Our contemporaries often conceive understanding as the ability to grasp at first hearing. Something is understandable if we can grasp it immediately. Such an approach is valid for the ordinary objects of our knowledge which can only be grasped at a purely cognitive level but this is more a question of registering than understanding. Where the depths of human--and divine--reality are concerned this approach does not work. Love, death, joy, solidarity, knowledge of God, can

never be grasped at once and on first inspection. In these cases, understanding is more a question of the biblical notion of “knowing-penetrating.” It is a lengthy and progressive process of becoming familiar with a particular reality. The same is true for the liturgy. It is not an object of knowledge in the commonplace sense of the word. It is not an object of knowledge at all, rather it is a source of knowledge, a source of understanding. This is why analysis is out of place here, only a prolonged listening and familiarization is appropriate. This implies also that the liturgy will only be open to understanding from a perspective of “empathy.” The liturgy lets itself be understood only by those who have faith in and who love it. For this reason it remains inaccessible and incomprehensible outside of the faith.

In addition, the liturgy is only understandable with a certain repetitiveness. Profound realities only gradually yield their full significance. This is why we have the phenomenon of “ritual” in the liturgy; and whoever speaks of “ritual” speaks of repetition.

Many changes in the liturgy in order to make it understandable have been inefficient because they focused on the immediate, cognitive, informative aspect of understanding. They wanted to explain everything, to provide commentary, to analyze. They never lead to familiarity with the liturgy. They are surgical and medical interventions (abbreviating, replacing, scrapping, describing) on a dying reality, a sort of palliative care which can never heal the sick individual. The only approach is the “dialogical” approach: allowing the liturgy time to say what it has to say; listening attentively to its harmonics and allowing its deeper meaning to unfold; not looking for an alternative but letting the liturgy speak for itself and expose its own virtualities.

VIII. Our disrupted relationship with the liturgy

The incomprehensibility of the liturgy is not so much due to the unintelligibility of its major symbols. Indeed, all of us are well able to grasp the deep fascination which flows forth from symbols such as fire, light, water, bread, wine, laying on of hands, anointing. These major (natural) symbols speak to us all in our archetypal imagination. Secondary symbols can, of course, be more problematic. At the same time, however, they are of lesser importance and Vatican II correctly discarded a number of them.

A more significant contributor to the problem of understanding is the fact that the symbolic universe within which such symbols functioned has been lost. Removed from its proper context, a liturgical symbol is like a fish out of water, and is left bereft of much of its vitality. Proof of this fact can best be found in what one might call “contrary” situations, where the symbolic universe continues to thrive even today. Why is it so that short Latin phrases and Gregorian refrains continue to function in Taizé but not in the parishes? Because they are in their proper place within the religious community of Taizé and its monastic liturgical life. Why is it that the symbols we have been discussing continue to function in the abbeys, the monastery churches and the charismatic communities? For the same reason! Why does a Gregorian requiem function well at a funeral? Liturgical comprehensibility also depends on a number of non-liturgical surrounding elements. It is our entire relationship with the liturgy--even outside the cultic celebration--that makes so much possible.

The incomprehensibility of the liturgy is not only due to the liturgy itself but in part to us. Our own attitude needs to be worked on. We need to examine our global relationship with God, our faith, our lifestyle, etc. Does the liturgy give meaning to these dimensions of our life or does it turn them into a “corpus extraneum”? We need to be aware of the fact that

understanding the liturgy is far more than a cognitive exercise; it is a loving “entering in.” At the same time our vision or contemplative gaze is weak. Since the Renaissance we have lost our disinterested contemplative ability; it was pushed aside to make way for analytic observation.

IX. What should we do?

What can we do?

It is quite clear that “entering in to the already existing” structure of the liturgy does not mean that we must exclude any kind of flexibility in our liturgical style. Far from being ruled out, creativity is actually called for. If the problem does not lie with creativity then where does it lie?

The problem lies with the boundaries of our intervention. One cannot simply transform and re-arrange the whole thing. Changes have to be made with intelligence. The liturgy contains certain given themes which, while they cannot be changed, do remain open to possible variation. Some of those clearly delineated and unchangeable liturgical paths were determined by Christ himself. In classical terms they are referred to as the “substance” of the sacraments, over which even the Church itself has no power. The liturgy remains Christ’s liturgy.

There are also more historically derived elements of the liturgy which one cannot change. Certain forms of prayer and certain words and ways of speaking which, like the bible texts, remain unchangeable. Perhaps even the liturgical order of scripture reading, lyrical response (psalm) and prayer falls into this category. It is more than just a liturgical vagary, it is a deep theological truth: God speaks first and our response follows.

In order to be able to establish the boundaries between theme and variations a thorough liturgical training is indispensable. Liturgy demands knowledge of tradition and history, in short: documentary knowledge. In order to take one’s place in the liturgical enterprise one has to know one’s craft: Liturgy requires instruction and insight together with a good helping of spirituality and pastoral awareness. Perhaps the reason for the evident liturgical poverty in so many places throughout the world can be found here. There is no lack of engagement or dedication or imagination: there is simply a lack of competence. There is no point in setting up liturgical work groups if they are not trained for their job.

X. The duration of the celebration

It might come across as strange in the ears of many but our liturgical celebrations are for the most part too short. The liturgy needs time to deliver its riches. It has nothing to do with physical time or “clock” time but with the spiritual time of the soul. Since liturgy does not belong to the world of information but to the domain of the heart, it does not work with ‘clock’ time but with “kairos.” Many of our liturgies do not provide enough time or space to enter in to the event. In this regard Eastern liturgy provides a worthy example, taking its time and inviting those who participate to “leave all worldly cares behind” (hymn of the Cherubim). It is not enough that people have heard the liturgy or that it has been spoken: has it been “proclaimed to them”? Have they been given the opportunity to integrate it? It is not enough for us to have heard the liturgy, we need to have grasped it as well.

A major factor in all of this is silence and the time to interiorize. The liturgy of Vatican II provides time for silence but in practice it is not given much of a chance. Lack of silence turns the liturgy into an unstoppable succession of words which leaves no time for interiorization. Here too is a reason for the liturgy's "incomprehensibility."

XI. The articulation of word and gesture

A major handicap of the liturgy as it is practiced de facto in the West is its "verbosity." In essence, liturgy has become matter of "language" and speaking. The word that was once ignored and neglected has made a comeback. How many celebrants consider the homily to be the climax of the liturgy and the barometer of the celebration? How many have the feeling that the celebration is more or less over after the liturgy of the Word? Indeed, there is clearly an imbalance in duration between the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist.

At the same time too much attention is given to the "intellectual" approach to the liturgy. There is not enough room for imagination, affect, emotion and properly understood aesthetics. This leads in turn to the consequence that the liturgy begins to function in an extremely intellectual fashion and fails thereby to reach many of those who participate in it because they are either non-intellectual types or because they do not consider such stuff to be nourishing for their lives.

A liturgy which is almost exclusively oriented to the intellect is also not likely to involve the human body in the celebration to any great extent.

There is a serious imbalance in the articulation of word and gesture. Without introducing rhetorical gesticulations and building in theatricality one can still argue, nevertheless, that the tongue and the ear are frequently the only human organs in use during the liturgy. Liturgy then ends up lapsing from celebration into mere instruction and address.

XII. The instrumentalization of the liturgy

One of the consequences of the verbosity we have been discussing is the danger that the liturgy will be instrumentalized and used for ends which lie outside it. Liturgy, however, is a global, symbolic activity which belongs to the order of the "playful." The uniqueness of "play" is the fact that one "plays in order to play," one plays for the sake of playing. The death of play is competition and financial interest.

Liturgy will also die if it is subordinated to ends beyond itself. Liturgy is neither the time nor the place for catechesis. Of course, it has excellent catechetical value but it is not there to replace the various catechetical moments in the life of the Christian woman or man. Such moments require their own time. Nor should liturgy be used as a means for disseminating information, no matter how essential that information might be. It should not be forced to serve as an easy way to notify the participants about this, that and the other unless such things are themselves entirely subordinate to the liturgy itself. One does not attend the liturgy on Mission Sunday in order to learn something about this or that mission territory: one comes to the liturgy to reflect on and integrate one's mission from Christ to "go out to all nations." The establishment of all sorts of thematic Sundays and thematic celebrations has little or no future, except in the death of the liturgy as such. Liturgy ought certainly not to serve as a sort of "warm up" for another activity, even a Church activity. It is not a meeting but a

celebration. It can indeed follow from the liturgy that one departs from it with a greater sense of engagement, faith and love informing and inspiring one's actions.

Liturgy is a free activity: its end is in itself. Although it is the "source and summit" of all ecclesial activities liturgy does not replace them nor does it coincide with them.

XIII. The 'sensorial' pedagogy of the liturgy

The uniqueness of the liturgy is that it gives pride of place to "experience." Experience comes first and while reflection, analysis, explanation and systematization might be necessary they must follow after experience.

"Celebrate first, then understand" might seem a strange proposition to some and perhaps even come across as obscuritanistic and anti-intellectual. Does it imply a call for irrationality or an abandonment of the massive catechetical effort the Church makes in order to prepare people to receive the sacraments? Think, for example, of the creed and confirmation.

The Church Fathers adhered to the principle that mystagogical catechesis (in which the deepest core of the sacred mysteries was laid bare) should only come after the sacraments of initiation. Prior to baptism they limited themselves to moral instruction and teaching on the Christian "way of life." Immediately after baptism--during Easter week--they spoke about the deep meaning of baptism, chrism and Eucharist. Their pedagogical approach remained "sensorial": participate first and experience things at an existential level in the heart of the community and only then explain. Their entire method of instruction was structured around a framework of questions and answers such as: "Did you notice that...?"--"Well what this means is..."

Perhaps we do not have to adhere to the letter of such a pedagogical approach--the "disciplina arcana" also had a hand in things--but it certainly provides a hint in the right direction. One can only understand the liturgy if one enters into it with faith and love. In this sense no catechetical method will succeed if it is unable to depend on good, community celebrations of the liturgy. In the same way catechesis as such will be of little use if it is not accompanied by a liturgical praxis during the period of catechesis.

Where the liturgy is concerned, the following rule applies: first experience, first "live" the liturgy, then reflect and explain it. The eyes of the heart must be open before the eyes of the mind because one can only truly understand the liturgy with the intelligence of the heart.

This has consequences for liturgical work groups: those who desire to work with the liturgy and, as we already noted, "vary the given theme," will first have to listen attentively to that theme and participate in the celebration of the liturgy as it is. If they do not, then their entire liturgical endeavor will turn out to be nothing more than "self-expression" and not the shaping of a pre-given entity which has its roots in the liturgical tradition of both the Old and New Testaments and in the living tradition of the Church. What would we think of a composer who refused to listen to his predecessors or a painter who refused to visit a museum? Every musician listens to music and every poet reads poetry. This is simple human wisdom but it applies in full to the liturgy which is primarily God's work with his people.

The worthy liturgist listens first, meditates, prays and interiorizes. Only then can he or she "modulate."

XIV. Ritual and boredom

The very terms "rite" and "ritual" summon up the idea of boredom and monotony. "It's always the same...", we hear day in day out. Ritual is synonymous with rigidity and sclerosis.

Is that really so, however? It is true that an exaggerated attachment to particular forms does exist, but that is ritualism, unsound ritual. We have to admit that every good thing has its pathology.

Ritual, however, is something other than ritualism. Ritual is priceless and irreplaceable. It has its place in every human activity. Every human being has a morning and evening ritual just as every society has its regular festivities which are celebrated in the same way each year.

Ritual is an unavoidably anthropological datum. Every significant human reality is surrounded and protected by ritual: birth, marriage, love, death. Every transition is adorned and embellished with ritual. Every time we encounter something that transcends the human person we "humanize" it with ritual.

The unique characteristic of every ritual is its repetitiveness and stereotypical nature. In order for us to interiorize profound matters, we need identical stereotypes, the reassuring ceremonial wordings we call ritual. This kind of repetition, however, does not necessarily imply monotony or the stifling of any kind of personal element. Every marriage rite, for example, is stereotypical: everyone marries in the same manner and with the same words and gestures. Yet in so doing those involved are not left depersonalized, a mere number in the line. Every marriage remains unique even though it took place in just the same way as any other. As a matter of fact it is essential for every couple that they are able to take their place in line with every other marriage in and through the fixed marriage rite. In this way the fragility of their personal engagement is socialized and, in their eyes, protected and guaranteed. The same is true for the language of love. It remains endlessly unvarying yet it is experienced as fresh and new each time it is spoken.

Repetitive ritual provides, in addition, the opportunity for in-depth reflection and interiorization. Serious matters (such as the liturgy) cannot be grasped all at once: they need time and time means repetition. Only pure information such as an order or a computer language does not require repetition since it can be understood immediately. More profound matters only let their real significance emerge over time.

Ritual, finally, provides a protection against direct, un-mediated religious experience. Only the great religious geniuses (such as Moses before the burning bush) are able for such experiences; the rest of us need the protective mediation of ritual and the "decelerating," "delaying" role of repetition.

Indeed, there will always be a certain monotony and perhaps boredom associated with ritual. Perhaps we simply have to be aware of it and reconcile ourselves with it, as long as we continue to bear in mind how necessary this "tiresome" aspect of ritual can be.

A few further reflections might also be useful. If we constantly emphasize the "tiresome" aspect of ritual we reveal just how individualistic our experience of the liturgy has become. Ritual, however, is necessary in order to bring a community together and allow it to celebrate. If we turn the liturgy into the most individual expression of the most individual emotion then

we wipe out any possibility of communal celebration. If, however, we enter into the Eucharistic celebration with it fixed “ratio agenda” it is because we want to make it possible for many to celebrate in the same rhythm. There can be no community without ritual.

We need to bear in mind, furthermore, that we attend the liturgy at God’s invitation. The liturgy is not a feast we laid out for ourselves, according to our own personal preferences. It is God’s feast. We attend by invitation and not simply to satisfy our own particular needs.

A great deal depends, to be sure, on the person of the presider. He is someone who must lead a community event on God’s behalf. He is the living vehicle of something that goes beyond him. He is, therefore, neither robot nor actor; he is a servant.

XV. The cosmic grounding of the liturgy

One important fact about the liturgy is its relatedness to the cosmos. Many of its symbols are borrowed from cosmic realities such as fire, light, water, food, bodily gestures. Times and seasons, the position of sun and moon, night and day, summer and winter are also related to the liturgy. In the liturgical event all the major human archetypes have their place.

What is important, however, is that the cosmic realities in question are given their chance to appear in their full reality as created things. The liturgy must work with “real” things. Although everything is to a certain degree transformed by culture it should never be overshadowed by cultural accretions. Fire needs to be real fire, light real light, linen real linen, wood real wood. Time must also be respected, such as the hour for the Easter vigil celebration. Thus liturgy often becomes the true repository of the authenticity of the objects around us. To serve God we use only the best things as He created them. Expediency and comfort need to make way here for authenticity.

We should be aware, however, that all our Jewish and Christian symbols are no longer purely cosmic or natural. They have all been determined and conditioned by the history of God with his people. Although all our Jewish-Christian feasts have an agrarian origin they have all been conditioned by the events of salvation which are historically situated and no longer natural; they are fact-historical. The Passover feast is no longer purely agricultural, it is also the celebration of the exodus from Egypt. Shebuoth is no longer a celebration of the first harvest but of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. With Christian feasts which are entirely determined by the historicity of the Christian mysteries it is even clearer. There are no more purely cosmic, natural feasts. The Christian festal calendar is no longer a purely natural calendar, it consists rather of a series of memorial days which celebrate historical events between God and his people.

XVI. The liturgy and the senses

Liturgy is closely related to the body and the senses. As a matter of fact there is only one fundamental symbolism: that of the human body as an expression of the human soul and thus the primary location of all symbols. All other symbolic gestures can be situated in the extension of the human body.

The eye is the most active of the senses. In the liturgy nowadays, however, it tends to be somewhat undervalued. There is a lot to hear but little to see. At one time the situation was reversed. At a time when the verbal dimension was not understood the visual dimension was

pushed to the fore. Certain secondary liturgical gestures, such as the elevation of the bread and wine at the consecration are a consequence of this fact. Even Eucharistic worship outside of mass has its roots here. We can certainly re-evaluate the visual side of our liturgy but that does not always mean that we have to supply additional visual effects. It is always best to let the great symbols function. How can it be understood as a water bath if it turns out to be little more than a sprinkling with water? How can we speak of “hearing the message” if everyone is sitting with their heads bent reading the texts in their missalettes at the moment when they should be listening? The three great focal points of the celebration: the presidential chair, the ambo and the altar, also have a strong visual significance.

Of great importance is that the different text genres should be respected: a reading is not a prayer, hymn is not a psalm, a song is not a monition nor is a homily a set of announcements. Each of these genres requires its own—auditive—treatment. Furthermore, it is clear that neither rhetoric nor theatricality nor pathos have a part in the liturgy. Reading is not acting: it is allowing oneself to be the humble instrument of a word that comes from beyond. The exaggerated impact of the personal individuality of the man or woman who reads can kill the liturgy and eliminate its harmonics.

Even the place from which the scriptures are read has some significance. It is better not to read from the middle of the community because the word comes to us from elsewhere. It is proclaimed; it does not simply arise out of the community. It is also best to read from the Book of the Gospels and from an ambo surrounded by symbols suggestive of respect (light, incense, altar servers).

The sense of touch finds its most profound expression in the laying on of hands and in anointing. These are among the most physical gestures of the liturgy and they can have an enormous impact on the human person. The significance of praying in the presence of a sick person takes on quite a different character if one places one’s hands on that person or anoints them.

The sense of smell, to conclude, is almost completely unused in the liturgy. It is not to our advantage that the use of incense has been pushed aside into the domain of superfluity and hindrance. The Eastern Church is much better off than we are in this regard. One rather absurd case is the scentlessness of the chrism which we use to suggest the ‘good odour of Christ’ to our newly confirmed. Here too the Eastern Church is ahead of us (perhaps too generously!) in their use of tens of different scents and spices in the manufacture of their chrism.

XVII. ‘Inculturation’

The problem of “inculturation” is a recent phenomenon. It was treated in a remarkable document produced by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship in 1994.

We cannot discuss every aspect of the problem at this juncture. The principle, however, is clear: if the liturgy is an “incarnational” fact then it is an inherent requirement that it be inculturated in the various cultures of humanity. Such is evident. Liturgy must be inculturated, or rather: liturgy will inculturate itself if it is lived with faith and love of Christ by people of all cultures.

There are also limits, however. The liturgy is not only a structuring of human religiosity, it gives form to the Christian mysteries. These mysteries took place in history, in a particular place and time and using particular rites and symbols. The last supper is not just a common, human religious meal, it is the meal the Lord ate with his disciples the night before he suffered. This implies that all Eucharistic celebrations need to be recognizable as such which includes even formal connections and references. No cultural religious meal is equivalent to the Christ meal. In this sense the Eucharist can never be completely “inculturated.”

The liturgy is not only an incarnational datum, it also belongs to the order of salvation. As such it has a salvific impact on the cultures of humankind. Not every religious practice or popular “liturgy” can be used as a “vehicle” for Christian liturgy. There are levels of incompatibility and there are prayers and practices which are not appropriate for use in the Christian liturgy. ‘Discernment’ here will not always be so simple.

Inculturation does not take place so much on the liturgist’s desk as in the praxis of liturgy itself. It is not an act of bureaucratic sophistication but rather a faithful loyal discernment which takes place in the celebration itself. Only after long and deep immersion in the real liturgy accompanied by a great desire for Christ and his mysteries, for Church tradition and for the historicizing of the “natural” liturgy through the coming of Christ will we see the slow but steady emergence of inculturated liturgy. This is how the Jewish liturgy transformed into the Greek and the Greek liturgy into the Roman and the Roman liturgy was supplemented and augmented by the German and Anglo-Saxon liturgy and so forth. Such work of inculturation has always been the fruit of the thoughts and deeds of a few significant Church figures and of the patient sensitivity and faith-filled discernment of the many peoples of the world.

It remains an open question whether we should consider inclusive language to be a question of inculturation. The discussion is still in full swing and would demand a separate and more thorough treatment than is possible here. In fact the question remains whether we are being faced with a radical cultural change or not and whether or not this has religious implications. It appears to me to be more of an anthropological problem which is not only significant for biblical and liturgical texts but for the use of language as such and for the whole dimension of conviviality between men and women.

XVIII. Liturgy and life.

There has been a great deal of discussion in recent years concerning the exotic character of the liturgy and its distance from the every day life of Christians. It is true indeed that a liturgy which has no impact on or consequences for the way Christians live their lives is off the mark. If, according to Pope Leo the Great, the Christian mysteries have crossed over into the liturgy then it is equally true that liturgy must cross over into the moral and spiritual life of Christians. “Imitami quod tractatis...” – “Do in practice what you do in the liturgy” resounds the ancient text from the liturgy of ordination.

Some have endeavored to draw the conclusion from this axiom that the liturgy is not important when compared with our day to day lives or that it is a sort of preparation or “warm-up” for life itself, an option for those who need it but redundant for those who don’t. Others have suggested that liturgy and life coincide and that true service to God takes place outside the church in one’s daily life.

Liturgy does not coincide with life, rather it has a dialectic relationship with life. Sunday is not Monday nor vice versa.

Aside from the liturgy's profound and significant content as an indispensable source of grace and power for life, we must also bear in mind that the Sunday ritual interrupts monotony and differentiates and articulates human time. The liturgy is not life and life is not liturgy. Both are irreducible and both are necessary. They do not coincide.

It is sometimes said that the liturgy gives shape to life, that it symbolizes life. This is not entirely incorrect. What we do throughout the week in a varied and diluted way we also do in the liturgy but in a more concentrated and purified fashion: we live for God and for others. Liturgy, however, is not only a symbolization of human life. Liturgy symbolizes and makes present: firstly the mysteries of salvation, the words and deeds of Christ, but also our deeds in so far as they are reflected, purified and redeemed in Christ. His mysteries--made present to us in the liturgy--are our archetypes. This Christological determination of our lives in the liturgy is of the essence.

On the other hand, it is a fact that the liturgy finds its field of application in daily life. It flows over it and nourishes it but never coincides with it nor complies with it. Life and liturgy are in a dialectic relationship: the life of the Christian is built on two things: cultus *and* caritas.

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