



IDEOLOGY AND LITURGY

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Homer called him Thersites. Every good schoolboy knows him as the eponym of all loud-mouthed, cowardly, cruel critics. Thersites is the professional reviler, the very type and model of scurrilous scoffers. He sneers at Agamemnon and is roundly cudged by Odysseus.

But Thersites is also the prototype of a familiar social phenomenon: the fearless, blistering critic of a given situation, too honest and clear-sighted to be deceived by humbug and romantic notions. Today, of course, in an “ecumenical age” of dialogue and pluralism, no one would lift a finger to silence an even apparently carping critic— or at least, so we hope.

And it is in this hope of escaping the fate of Thersites, that the thoughtful theologian ventures to present some reflections upon liturgical problems in the *ecclesia in mundo huius temporis* and their relationship to our task of evangelization within the Church and in the world.

In reply to the countless chronic vexations, indeed scandals, caused by the “new conception of liturgy and of the Church” which is being imprinted upon the Church’s celebrations of the Eucharist, we always hear the self-same conciliatory, beguiling remonstrances: the real purpose of it all was an accommodation to so-called “modern man,” and adaptation which would leave the essentials untouched and (it goes without saying) would remain in continuity with the pre conciliar Church.

Assurances such as these have long since lost whatever meager credibility they may perhaps have had. The innovators had already revealed themselves and their real intentions by devaluating the so-called “pre-conciliar” Church, in fact often treating it with ridicule and contempt. This applied in particular to the liturgy, which because it was “old,” was *de facto* banished and practically outlawed. All this, of course, has very little to do with the last council and its constitution on the sacred liturgy. On the contrary, in para. 23 of that document, the council fathers established this admirable general principle: there must be no innovation unless

the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires it, and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.

Viewed in this way, it is 'clear that the situation which is so widespread today has arisen in various ways out of disobedience to this basic principle, this expressed will of the council. And it is equally clear that the situation is not only being maintained but carried even farther in its anti-conciliar dynamism.

A few years ago, Bishop Rudolf Graber of Regensburg asked, "Where do the conciliar texts speak of communion in the hand, for example, or where do they enjoin the so-called altar facing the people (which is scant testimony to that 'giving perfect glory to God' which the liturgy constitution says (in para. 5) is the goal and purpose of worship? The answer is: Nowhere."¹ This good bishop went on to mention a number of other things which fall into the same category: elimination of the subdiaconate and the four minor orders; the monotonous enumeration of "Sundays in ordinary time"—while the Protestants of course have retained the pre-Lenten season and the Sundays "after Trinity;" *de facto* abandonment of Latin as liturgical language of the western Church; elimination of the second imposition of hands during priestly ordination, and many others.

No, it was not the desire for continuity which prevailed here. Instead, there began here—at first stealthily and with cunning "anticipatory obedience" *via facti* and then quite openly—a consciously revolutionary process; another Church using a new liturgy as means, vehicle and instrument of social pressure (meaning that whoever refuses to cooperate, is isolated).

A teacher of liturgy recently spoke to this point with gratifying clarity: "The council was a Copernican revolution." There is taking place today a "revolution in our understanding of the Church" towards a "new Church." Now, the congregation is the subject of the worship service. And he added the deceptive and untrue statement that "the council has not left to us the path of tradition." One is tempted to ask, with the Sanhedrin of old, "What need have we for any further witnesses? We ourselves have heard of his own mouth" (Luke 22:54). Indeed, the culture wars are raging unabated in the holy Church of God, and the divine liturgy often resembles in fact the battlefield that it has become in the ongoing war of ideas. The legitimate liturgist may be permitted to suggest that we can preserve and maintain our personal orientation in this *Kulturkampf*, if we but remember that the crisis of the liturgy is but a reflection of the crisis of faith, that liturgical problems are by no means unrelated to the reinterpretation of our beliefs in those numberless new theological constructs to which our seminarians are so often exposed, constructs in which the doctrinal tradition of the Church (whose continuity is to be experienced only through long and patient study) is frivolously replaced with new and allegedly more currently topical visions and versions. This crisis of faith or, if you will, this post-conciliar wave of demythologization, has two main centers of gravity or (perhaps more accurately) two chief spearheads of attack:

¹ *Theologisches* (July, 1985), col. 6476.

1) creeping Arianism, which degrades the mystery of the hypostatic union to nothing more than the “unsurpassable self-communication of God” in the man Jesus; and

2) the denial, disparagement or (as current vogue expresses it) the “marginalizing” of Christ’s Real Presence under the Eucharistic forms—which, of course, goes hand in hand with the re-interpretation of Transsubstantiation.

If belief in the Real Presence were still intact among all baptized Catholics, we could end this lecture right here. If belief in the Real Presence were still intact throughout the Catholic Church, then even the most progressivist supporters of a new human and “happy” liturgy would scarcely run the risk of donning clown costumes, for instance, or Indian war bonnets to greet the unbloody re-presentation of the Sacrifice of the Cross—in other words the presence of the Crucified One who is really and truly there as a victim upon the altar.

If belief in the Real Presence were still intact in each and every member of the ubiquitous parish “liturgy teams,” then for obvious reasons they would fear that the very Blood of Christ present upon the altar would cry to heaven in the all too frequent blasphemous Masses which—alas!—are part of the normal scenery in the post-conciliar Church!

One need not be a learned scholar to ask oneself in pained puzzlement, why it is that today, in our crypto-materialistic and totally temporal, earthbound age, belief in the mystery of the Real Presence has been made so very difficult for men who so easily succumb to the temptation of saying: All that exists, is what we can imagine. According to the magnificent hymn of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the mystery of the Real Presence is the greatest imaginable challenge to man’s power of believing. And it is a very curious fact that at the precise moment when great waves of secularism and demythologization threaten to engulf the Church, the sacred event of impenetrable mystery, which should take place at a certain appropriate distance (which itself suitably expresses the incomprehensible immensity of that miracle), is instead drawn into harsh proximity. It is not seldom accomplished in a disagreeably conversational tone, a chatty style which as harshly contradicts the fundamental law that form and content should always correspond to each other in proper proportion. Even non-believing sociologists² have noted that in explicit antithesis to the *discretio* of the ancient Roman rite and of the eastern rites, which even today mask and conceal the sacred event, the new liturgy surpasses even the restrained sobriety of the early Protestant divines by reducing the sacramental to the level of the banal, the everyday—which is by definition the opposite of the *Sacruin*. But, of course, we have the assurance of confident Jesuits³ that if by “sacred” we mean the effect of what Rudolf Otto described as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, then we are formulating expectations which have nothing at all to do with Christian worship.

² E.g. Alfred Lorenzer, *Das Konzil der Buchhalter* (Frankfurt, 1981), 192.

³ Such as e.g. Lud. Bertsch S.J., *Die Gruendung der Priesterbruderschaft St. Petrus. Ausweg oder neue Sackgasse?: Anzeigerfner die Seelsorge* (Freiburg, 1991), no. 5, p. 204.

II. Let us be more specific by attempting to analyze with all necessary brevity the process of demythologization and the transformation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Our analysis is presented in the true spirit of post-conciliar theology, whose two key concepts are “dialogue” and “discussion.” Many persons construe these words as meaning that all earlier theology—to which in 1995 Vatican II itself already belongs—is only a transitional point which has no place in a canon of faith which transcends the mere requirements of historical relevance. Hence the call to trace out all ecclesiastical and theological problems in a *colloquium, quad sola caritate erga veritate ducatur* (*Gaudium et Spes* 92), for which the participants are to prepare themselves that they *partes suas agere possint* (*Gaudium et Spes* 43). It is in such a love for the truth that the thoughtful theologian is trained, and this obliges him not only to regard his participation in this *colloquium* as one of his most important tasks in the *Ecclesia huius temporis*, but also to conduct his side of the discussion *rerum natura duce, ratione comite*.

The first step in our analysis of the relationship between demythologization and redefining the Sacrifice of the Mass, is to note that here too, there is a logical consistency which leads from a theocentric to the anthropocentric viewpoint. The spokesmen for permanent liturgical revolution never tire of inculcating their new gospel: that we should eschew the narrow and restrictive views of an earlier age and conceive the Mass not so much in terms of worship or sacrifice, as of God’s action upon men, as though—in opposition to all the great theologians and all the councils—it were less a matter of adoring and glorifying the most High God by means of an appropriate propitiatory sacrifice, and more a matter of human well-being and happiness. Secondly, we must recall that today, when the infinitely holy and adorable majesty of God has receded so far into the background, and gradually faded away in favor of a “nice,” friendly God, it has little by little become fashionable to deny that the essence of the Sacrifice of the Cross is *satisfactio vicaria* (vicarious satisfaction). What sort of a God would that be, they ask, who demands such a bloody sacrifice?⁴ And in this context the propitiatory character of the Sacrifice of the Mass naturally fades away, too.

Thirdly, we should note the transformation of what was formerly called the “consecration” of the Mass⁵ into the “words of institution” or the “institution narrative,” of which one now simply says, “It proclaims in the form of a prayer the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus.”⁶ How often has each one of us observed the “institution narrative” mechanically rattled off without a pause or a break, while the celebrant (the “presider”?) candidly gazed at the assembly!

⁴ So, for example. H. Kessler, *Erlosung als Befreiung* (Düsseldorf, 1972) or H. Vorgrimler, *S.J., Jesus-Gottes und des Menschen Sohn: Herderbuecherei 1107* (Freiburg, 1984), 69.

⁵ At which, according to Kiemens Richter, the limits of “magical understanding” were easily reached in former times. See A. A. Haeussling, O.~.B. (ed.), *Vom Sinn der Liturgie: Schriften der Katholischen Akademie in Bayern* (Düsseldorf, 1991), 144.

⁶ Kl. Richter: cf. K. Richter-A. Schilson (edd.), *Den Glauben feiern. Wege liturgischer Erneuerung* (Mainz, 1969), 111.

Fourthly, it has become generally accepted—at least by the members of the “Liturgy Club”—that “it is no longer the priest alone, but rather the assembled congregation as a whole which is subject and executant of the liturgical action.”⁷ And as a matter of fact this statement actually represents a “Copernican revolution.” For in spite of the assurances that “all the faithful participate in Christ’s priesthood,”⁸ it is simply no longer true that the ordained priest, as such, clearly and unmistakably acts *in persona Christi* who functions as the real High Priest. Hence it is no accident that in such a context one finds curious statements such as this: “All things considered, one must indeed say that the concept of ‘priest’ is not particularly suitable.. .for describing the specific function of office-holders in the Church.”⁹

And with that we arrive at our fifth point: the transformation of the priest into a “presider,” a term which is used with an almost exclusive pointedness in the new liturgical books. It is not only the new word which is significant. Here we find a palpable instance of demythologization in the manner in which the doctrine of the indelible character which the candidate receives in the sacrament of Holy Orders, is reinterpreted in a new way. One thinks here of the former professor of dogmatics at Tubigen, Walter Kasper, and the truly surprising interpretation which he gave to the “indelible mark” some twenty years ago. Kasper, who not too long ago was consecrated a successor of the apostles and today serves as Bishop of Rottenburg Stuttgart, said that the *character indelibilis* was a new sense of dedication, or engagement or total commitment which the candidate receives in Holy Orders, similar to the new sense of dedication which a fire department lieutenant experiences when he opens the letter of appointment promoting him to captain!¹⁰

Sixth and lastly, for the straightforward transparency to which I have already referred. This pellucidity has become one of the standard demands of the liturgical tinkers: as if it were quite appropriate, instead of completely grotesque, to call for the same insipid clearness which we rightly expect in everyday events—but at the sublime event of Holy Mass, in which the *mysterium tremendum* of the Incarnation repeats itself, in the correctly understood sense of that expression. If there is anything which has driven people out of the churches in such large numbers in the wake of the last council, then it is this presumptuous insistence upon banal intelligibility, this cheapening of the Sacred which reduces it to the level of the normal and the everyday, thus effectively profaning it.

And with that we have sketched out the theological horizon or backdrop which enables us to identify more clearly the ideological roots of the new and in fact almost cultic reference to the

⁷ Richter-Schilson (note 6), 149.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thus, Th. Schneider, professor of dogmatic theology at Mainz, cited in Richter-Schilson, *ibid.*

¹⁰ See the series of articles in the *Deutsche Tagespost*, nos. 57 and 67 (1973) as well as in the *Una Voce Korrespondenz* 13 (1983), 353 ff.

assembly, the community, which for its part documents itself in a new understanding of the Mass as creative play, as vivacious, high-spirited celebration with dance, pop and op after the consecration, and rhythmic applause in between times.

One of these ideological roots is the misunderstood demand for active participation, *participatio actuosa* which results in pressure for emancipation and self-actualization during the actual representation of the event of Calvary. The *piccolomini* who make up the liturgical establishment desire to produce “community” synthetically, but they overlook the fact that it is already present! Who can deny that participants in the Holy Sacrifice are related to each other in the most profound sense of that word—through sanctifying grace which makes them “blood brothers,” so to speak, in a spiritual and very real sense? Who can deny that such close “relatives” constitute a part of the Mystical Body of Christ and hence possess a kingly dignity, which unites them with each other in a much deeper way than even the term “community” would lead us to suspect?

This dignity makes it possible for them to receive Christ the Son of the living God in Holy Communion, whereby this royal dignity is heightened and emphasized even more, so that here it cannot be a case of beginning, within the framework of a “meal” or “celebration of the Lord’s Supper,” to bring about “community.” It is, of course, true that at Holy Mass, “community” “happens” in a very special way—but it is bestowed: it comes about from the altar which is its source, and for that reason it does not need to be “organized.” This “community” occurs by virtue of the fact that those present take part adoringly, marveling and deeply stirred by the Holy Event—and thus in an ineffably intimate way unite themselves with the sacred Action and with the Eucharistic Christ.

It is not by accident that our civilized languages speak of the highest level of participation or sharing—the spiritual and intellectual level—as “knowledge.” How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? says the Mother of God to the Archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:34). Considering such full and complete reverential-meditative absorption in the Holy Sacrifice, one can only say that the attempts of many modern *liturgisti* to achieve “participation” through all sorts of aids, handouts and busy activity are in fact—a grotesque misunderstanding of the essence of such participation! From this compulsion to organize “community” there results, almost automatically, the shape and form of the new liturgy and above all the tendency according to which it develops so rapidly. Faith is admittedly very different from perceptible experience, and to the degree in which faith and the objective even recede and diminish, to that degree “community” as such must needs be generated and the congregation thereby consolidated—and all within the space of an hour at most. So now, the law which the innovators have transgressed so flagrantly with their de-sacralization—namely the law that form and content always correspond to each other—ironically turns round against itself, and constrains even them to obey. For that “we-feeling” of “together with all of you and Jesus” or, to place the emphasis quite correctly, “all together with Jesus,” can only be generated through the singular blending of wheedling and clerical tutelary guardianship, indeed violence, which we experience today in countless sanctuaries. It is the “ego renewal” of

Father Histrionicus and his minions so accurately described by Professor Thomas Day under the rubric, “You’re lookin’ great, Narcissus.”¹¹

Reflect for a moment, if you will, upon the style of so many celebrants today who so often, at the very beginning of the divine liturgy, wish the assembled parishioners a “nice day.” It is really more than embarrassing, for it recalls all too distinctly the diligent and obliging busyness with which the receptionist of a third-rate boarding house might greet potential guests: in more elegant establishments the concierge maintains a good deal more reserve and a certain distance. Here, in these animated greetings or farewells (which often enough culminate in the banal hope for pleasant weather and a “happy Sunday”) we see the influence of that new theology which has given us the “nice” God Who no longer punishes sinners and Who sees to it that Hell remains empty. But these pleasant human qualities of the “president of the assembly” are necessary in order to relax or “loosen up” the atmosphere, to remove its preconiliar “churchiness,” and to prepare the participants at the very beginning of the service for that free and easy unceremoniousness in which “togetherness” can arise unencumbered. Thomas Day deftly but accurately describes this phenomenon as the “solemn high explanation Mass” presided over by “Mr. Nice Guy,” the priest as “triumphant monarch” whose voice “has been magnified to superhuman proportions” so that it now is “louder than the choir, organ and singing congregation combined.”¹² The resulting torrent of verbiage vividly illustrates “the deceptive dialectics of liturgical progressivism, which desired to elevate the congregation to mature subject of the liturgy, but in fact has made it the object of a new ‘presidential’ clericalism, a collection of merely-listening consumers...”¹³

Surely such a “consumer” attitude, which has transformed “hearers of the Word” into hearers of countless words, contradicts not only the declared intention of the liturgical reformers, which was to free the faithful from the domination of the priestly caste by making them mature participants. It also points up the inopportune nature of this aspect of the reform, which here at least intensifies the fatefully unfortunate tendencies of the present age instead of countering them energetically, as the Church always did in earlier times. Karl Jaspers once said that educational formation in the full and deep sense of that term, means simply the readiness to be spiritually and intellectually moved, touched and stirred. This is scarcely possible any more, even in secular life, because such a readiness presupposes the ability to recollect oneself, to pause in silence, stopping patiently in order to listen carefully with all our senses and with all our inner powers in that undivided attentiveness which the great Jesuit scholastic-theologian, Francisco Suarez, called *attentio subs tantialis*.¹⁴ Through such “substantial attention” we are enabled to ponder in heart and mind all aspects of the spoken and the written word, weighing it, judging and considering it

¹¹ T. Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (New York, 1990), 50/5.

¹² Day (note 11), 134/5.

¹³ W. Hoeres, *Gottesdienst als Gemeinschaftskult. Ideologie und Liturgie: Distinguo I* (Bad Honnef, 1992), 18. I am indebted to the analysis of Prof. Floeres for the main points of the preceding discussion.

¹⁴ On this, see W. Hoeres, *Bewusstsein und Erkenntnisbild bei Suarez Scholastik* 36 (1961), 192 ff.

carefully. Plainly, such reflection applies even more to the religious life and above all to the sphere of the Sacred. After all, according to the principle that grace presupposes nature and builds upon it, spiritual life can flower and develop only in the presence of that inwardness which alone enable us to perceive the gentle breath and the tender attraction of grace, and to assimilate or appropriate it in the very depths of our spirit, so that it does not wither and die like the seed which falls upon rocky ground. These, then, are some of the reasons why the passionate liturgical progressivists seem to be victims of what Max Horkheimer once called “instrumental rationality,” which confound meaningful existence with productively useful being, confuses *agere* with *facere*, and thus views liturgy as valid only when it produces some palpable practical benefit: namely the creation of community through the production of a new community consciousness.

III. The steeds of night run on apace, and we must make an end of our analysis. We shall conclude our reflections with a response, a lesson, and a practical suggestion.

1. Can a latter-day Thersites expect a hail of blows from the ecclesiastical *epigones* of Odysseus and Agamemnon? Does he deserve reproof? Or is he, in many ways, right after all? That is the question. What would the deputy chief commander of the Church Militant say by way of response?

At a weekly general audience in the spring of 1993, Pope John Paul II publicly stated that “the data on participation of the faithful at Mass are not satisfactory.” Despite local efforts to bring people back to church with vibrant liturgies, attendance percentages remain low, he said, at Catholic churches in the United States and abroad. While statistics never tell the full story, he continued, it cannot be ignored that “external worship” generally reflects the level of internal worship among Catholics.

Those who see the Mass as just a “ritual gesture” miss the point, the pope said. “The Eucharistic celebration is not simply a ritual gesture, in fact: it is a sacrament, an intervention by Christ Himself Who communicates to us the dynamism of His love,” he said. “It would be a destructive illusion to pretend to have behavior in line with the gospel without receiving the strength of Christ Himself in the Eucharist, a sacrament He instituted for this purpose. Such a claim would be an attitude of self-sufficiency and radically opposed to the gospel,” he said.

The pope called on priests to promote Mass attendance through catechesis, exhortation and excellence in liturgical celebration. He said this forms a central part of the priest’s “care of souls.”

Any further commentary would really be superfluous. *Non jam frustra doces, Thersites!*

2. Is there any lesson to be learned from all of this? An error to be recognized, IDEOLOGY diagnosed and avoided, perhaps? The legitimate liturgist may be permitted to suggest that there is indeed, and that it was pointed out for us by L. Brent Bozell a quarter century ago, as he spoke in a context that included liturgical “problems” which then were but aborning. According to this

insight, the import of the phenomena we have analyzed in this paper is that because new “ritual gestures” exist, the official Church must come to terms with them and with the skewed beliefs they embody.

It is the same message, in microcosm, that urges Christianity to accommodate itself to the twentieth century because this is the twentieth century. It is (a message) dispatched and received as easily as the air itself in a country that has learned to be intimidated by “facts,” to shrink from any response to them that might involve thought or judgment or will. The argument moves from the existence of the thing to the correctness of the thing: what is, ought to be. Or, a popular variant: if a thing is, it doesn’t make any difference whether it ought to be—the correct response is to adjust, to learn to live with the thing. It is not a new theory. It is called positivism. Its inevitable corollaries are relativism and subjectivism. And its ravages in politics and law are nothing compared with the havoc it visits on religion.¹⁵

3. If we wish to avoid such havoc in our own lives, what steps must we take? Chiefly two, it may be suggested. First, we must hold fast to the *doctrina catholica* as it is now presented to us in the authoritative and universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*)¹⁶ Briefly stated, in an original translation, that doctrine is as follows.

At that first Whitsuntide, when the Holy Ghost was poured out’ and the Church manifested to the world, there commenced a new period in the “dispensation of the mystery:” the age of the Church, during which Christ shows forth, renders present and communicates His work of salvation through the liturgy of His Church. Christ now lives and acts in and with His Church in a new way which is proper to this new age. He acts by means of the sacraments, in what the ancient tradition of East and West calls the “sacramental economy,” which consists in the communication or “dispensation” of the fruits of the Paschal mystery of Christ in the celebration of the “sacramental” liturgy of the Church.

The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, Head and members. It is celebrated without interruption by our one High Priest in the heavenly liturgy, with the holy Mother of God, the apostles, all the saints and the multitude of men who have already entered the kingdom. In the liturgical celebration, the entire assembly is the “liturgist,” each one according to his proper function. The baptismal priesthood is that of the whole Body of Christ. However, some of the faithful are ordained in the sacrament of Holy Orders to represent Christ as Head of the Body.

And now the second suggestion: that all of the baptized, layfolk and clerics together, unite in a conscious effort to renew and deepen their individual interior participation in the divine liturgy, and thus to effect a gradual transformation of the *mundus huius temporis*. It is the task of the ordained to offer ritual sacrifice in the name of the Church and in the person of Christ; it is the

¹⁵ L. Brent Bozel, “The Coming American Schism”. *Triumph* 2 (1967), 10/7, here 12.

¹⁶ Cf. e.g., paragraphs 1097/8, 1136, 1140/2 and 1076 with 1187/8 as cited here.

task but also the privilege of the non-ordained to share in this sacrifice by offering their own spiritual sacrifices, as the last council reminds us (*Lumen gentium* 34). But what, exactly, are these spiritual sacrifices? In a very special way, for the non-ordained laity, all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed, even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, and in the celebration of Holy Mass, these may—nay, must!—be offered to the Father along with the Body of the Lord. And this is how, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. *Eia, fratres, pergamus!*