

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 91 published 12 March 2018

THE MASS OF PAUL VI: A HEMORRHAGE OF THE SACRED

Having analyzed the new Missal from a ceremonial point of view (read here), we are devoting the present letter and a letter to follow to the very content of the missal promulgated on April 3, 1969 as well as to its deficiencies from a doctrinal and spiritual point of view. For the past fifty years these deficiencies have led to a veritable hemorrhage of the sacred.

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Communion in Manila in January

2015 during one of Pope Francis's visits. Loss of the sense of the sacred, loss of the eucharistic sense: the sad fruit of a liturgical reform that had claimed to make the holy mysteries "easier to understand."

I—A Presumption of ecumenism, but only towards Protestantism

Ecumenism, the key word of

Vatican II, was aimed at Protestantism alone in liturgical matters. The Consilium for the implementation of the liturgical reform immediately ruled out the desire that Fr. (later Archbishop) Annibale Bugnini, its secretary, had expressed of inviting Orthodox observers.

On the other hand, five Protestant observers attended its meetings already at the October 1966 session: two named by the Anglican Communion; one by the World Council of the Churches; one by the Lutheran World Federation; one by the Taizé Community (Max Thurian). They attended all of the meetings. Placing the entire revision of the Roman liturgy under the observation of representatives of those communities that are most critical of "papist" worship amounted to a revolution.

There were several occasions on which they were officially consulted. For example, the section of the instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* of May 25, 1967 on the Eucharist in an

ecumenical perspective was composed “taking into account the remarks of non-Catholic brethren” (Jean-Marie Roger Tillard “Commentaire de l’Instruction sur le culte eucharistique,” *La Maison-Dieu* 91 [1967]: 55). More generally their influence, due to a concern to “take a step in their direction,” was manifest, as in the manner of composing the new Sanctoral Collects. In their case care was taken “as much as possible to suppress any allusion to the intercession of the saints” (Pierre Journel, “Les Oraisons du propre des saints dans le nouveau missel,” *La Maison-Dieu* 105 [1971]: 182).

But the main point of ecumenical collaboration was the composition of a new Sunday lectionary. The Protestant observers, for example, explained how shocked they were that the traditional liturgy should use readings from the Wisdom books for Marian feasts (Pierre Journel, “Le Culte de la Vierge Marie dans l’année liturgique,” *Paroisse et Liturgie* 87: 13-14), and they were accommodated. The question was: should the traditional lectionary be enriched, or should an entirely new one be created? An enrichment in a traditional line was considered, with a system of supplementary readings formerly in use in certain places, but Fr. Cipriano Vagaggini was able to convince his confreres of the necessity to recast the whole thing.

At the end of the day the new lectionary was organized as follows:

1/ The Sunday and feast day lectionary inaugurated the principle of three readings, with a semi-continuous readings of the Epistles and Gospels in two independent cycles.

2/ The ferial lectionary, with two readings, the first being drawn up on a two-year cycle, the Gospel on a yearly cycle.

3/ The Saints’ lectionary, with two readings. Only texts strictly referring to a specific saint are, in fact, obligatory. And for the readings for sacraments, baptisms, weddings, or funerals, there is full freedom.

Ultimately a tradition of over a millennium was overturned, which reduced to irrelevance a whole line of commentaries referring to this venerable Roman lectionary, both ancient (Saint Bonaventure) and modern (Dom Guéranger).

II—A diminished expression of the Real Presence

This context of

Protestant-orientated ecumenism led to a weaker reverence towards the Real Presence in the Eucharist. This is the result of a whole host of transformations.

Among

them is the reduced number of the priest's genuflections after the consecration (from twelve in the Tridentine Missal to three in the new Missal).

The

obligatory joining of the thumb and index finger of each hand after the consecration and until the ablution after Communion is suppressed. This practice helped avoid dropping particles of the Host that might have been stuck to the fingers. These two fingers no longer are carefully rubbed together over the chalice as they used to be. Likewise particles that might happen to be on the corporal are no longer scraped off with the paten into the chalice before the Communion of the Most Precious Blood. Lastly, purifying the fingers with wine and water after the distribution of Communion is suppressed.

It is no

longer obligatory for the chalice cup, the ciborium, and the inside of the paten to be gilded in honor of the sacred species. A single altar cloth is necessary as opposed to the three traditional cloths, which could absorb the consecrated wine should it ever be spilled. The pall covering the chalice to avoid dust or insects falling into it has become optional.

The Institution

Narrative in the new Missal seems rather like the retelling of a past event than an intimation over the bread and wine present on the altar since the font used for the words of consecration is identical to that used above and below them, whereas in the traditional Missal these words are printed in a markedly larger font. Likewise, while in the traditional Missal the words *Hoc est enim Corpus . . .* and *Hic est enim calix . . .* are separated from the text before them by a hard return, in the new Missal these words are introduced by a colon, as if to introduce a narrative quotation.

The prayer *Perceptio*

Corporis tui, the most reverential of the prayers preparing for Communion—"Let not the partaking of Thy Body, O Lord Jesus Christ, which I, though unworthy, presume to receive, turn to my judgment and condemnation . . ."—is omitted in the new Missal.

The most important change from the point of view of signs and their consequences on the reverence and faith of the faithful is the introduction of Communion in the hand for the faithful. From 1965/1966 on, without any authorization, Communion started to be given in the hand, an abuse to which episcopal conferences turned a blind eye. The Holy See then organized a strange survey among the bishops of the world to find out whether this "illegal" practice was legitimate or not. The clear majority of the bishops' answers was negative: Communion in the hand was not legitimate. Yet the Instruction *Memoriale Domini* of May 29, 1969 raised it to the status of "exception": Communion traditionally received kneeling and on the tongue remained the rule *per se*, but the Holy See left Communion in the hand up to the judgment of the bishops' conferences. And the abuse, now an "exception", soon became the rule: the near-totality of conferences adopted this new manner

of receiving Communion. Happening as it did within the context of modernity, this reception of the consecrated Host in the hand concretely broke a long tradition of religious respect and made something banal out of one of the most important and striking liturgical moments for the faithful who participate in the holy mysteries.

III—The priest as
hierarchy becomes priest as president.

Paradoxically, in the reformed liturgy
the distinction between the president and the faithful has become sharper.

Indeed, the traditional worship forms melded all participants into a single ritualized whole. The weakened ritualism of the new ceremonies as well as the important share given to free interventions from the celebrant give considerable room for his personal “play.” In an act of worship entirely in the vernacular with a good share of improvisation, his presence is far more visible than in the traditional form.

In the new Mass, the celebrant is rather a president than an hierarchy interceding for the people. The sacramental distinction between the priest and the ministers and the faithful is less obvious through a number of details: the *Confiteor* at the beginning of Mass is common to all, after which the priest no longer grants absolution, whereas there is a *Confiteor* reserved to the priest followed by that of the ministers and the priest’s absolution in the older Missal. This request for the purification of the minister’s soul was echoed in two prayers said by the priest, one from the Leonine Sacramentary (“Take away from us our iniquities, we beseech Thee, O Lord”) as he ascended the altar, the other as he bowed before it (“We beseech Thee, O Lord, by the merits of Thy Saints, whose relics are here, and of all the Saints, that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to forgive me all my sins”). The former distinction between the priest’s Communion and that of the faithful (the priest said three times for himself *Domine non sum dignus* . . ., received the Body and Blood, then turned to the faithful who also recited *Domine non sum dignus* three times) has been abolished: the priest says once and with the people “Lord I am not worthy to receive you . . .”, receives Communion, and the Communion of the faithful begins.

As for the servers, there is an inversion. In the traditional Mass they may be laymen, but they are assimilated to clergy for the duration of the celebration. In the new Mass, the ministers of the altar clearly remain laymen, which laicizes the celebration. This goes quite far: Paul VI’s motu proprio *Ministeria quaedam* of August 15, 1972, which suppressed minor orders and the subdiaconate, left only the two ministries of lector and acolyte subsist, reserved to men, but who remain lay faithful. Under any hypothesis the different liturgical services performed during the Mass, the readings, universal prayer intentions, directing the assembly’s singing, distributing Communion as extraordinary ministers, are performed by the faithful as laymen. This is confirmed by the fact that they may be men or women, the latter of which, so far, are unable to enter the clerical estate.

Regarding service at the altar itself, the two instructions *Liturgiae instaurationes* of September 5, 1970 and *Inaestimabile donum* of April 3, 1980 had restated that women are barred from serving at the altar. Nevertheless, the practice of altar girls was spreading apace. At that point, following the now customary procedure, there was a shift from prohibition to exceptional permission of what was, in reality, the common usage: a response from the Congregation for Divine Worship of March 15, 1994 specified that the principle remained the same (“it will always be very appropriate to follow the noble tradition of having boys serve at the altar”), but that it was up to the judgment of each bishop to authorize such a service as *ex temporanea deputatione* (“a temporary deputation”). Once again an abuse, renamed “exception,” has become the rule in practice.

IV—Less transcendence, more “insertion into life”

The theme of active participation of all the baptized was of a piece with adapting texts, gestures, and symbols for a greater comprehension of the message. The liturgy needed to be more pedagogical for people today (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 34). This shows a strange misunderstanding of the signs of the times: our contemporaries, having been deprived of this symbolic patrimony by the reform, look for it in Oriental liturgies and, as it becomes more accessible, simply in the traditional liturgy.

Moving from a sacred language to a common-use language (and purely common at that, without the distance provided by an ancient version such as, among the Anglicans, the Book of Common Prayer or the King James Version of the Bible, or Church Slavonic among the Orthodox or certain Russian Uniate) has contributed much to this. Discourse passed from a purely liturgical language to a discourse on a lower register, which at best may derive some little sacrality from the “priest’s tone” but is for the most part rendered completely banal.

The quality of expression in the new prayers, having been purposefully made accessible to the intended audience, accentuates this impression and sometimes goes so far as to devalue the message. So in the Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs IV: “[Jesus] present in our midst when we are gathered by his love and when, as once for the disciples, so now for us, he opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread.” Likewise in the First Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children: “On the night before he died, Jesus was having supper with his apostles. He took bread from the table. He gave you thanks and praise. Then he

broke the bread, gave it to his friends, and said: . . .” In the second Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children: “God, our loving Father, we are glad to give you thanks and praise because you love us.” Or again: “He came to take away sin, which keeps us from being friends, and hate, which makes us all unhappy.” In the third: “We can see and speak to one another, and become friends, and share our joys and sorrows.”

Furthermore and contrary to the practice of the traditional Roman liturgy, nearly everything is now said out loud, including the Eucharistic Prayer. Yet the silence of the Canon, which is attested as early as the ninth century, served as a virtual iconostasis in the Latin liturgy. The “secret” of the sacred action was one of the great Roman characteristics, the image of Christ’s silent prayer as he went up to the sacrifice. This mysterious barrier no longer exists, the audible diction underscoring the rather common form of the discourse.

It leaves an impression of “perpetual chatter” pushing away any silent recollection, especially since the celebrant must willy-nilly take over the ceremony as his own, long personal speech.

Noteworthy

too is an emphasis stemming from the naïve admiration with which theology discovered the human sciences in the fifties and sixties. This phenomenon translated into a desire to show a bond with earthly realities. The handshake that participants exchange during the Eucharist before Communion underscores their solidarity. The “euchologies” that replaced the Offertory put forward the signification of the bread and wine as “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.”

This reduction of the

sacred is the result of numerous secular elements having been introduced into the celebration: men and women in street clothes proclaiming the readings or distributing Communion as extraordinary ministers; the handshake or kiss on both cheeks as sign of peace; wishing parishioners a good Sunday at the dismissal like a baker seeing his customers off.

And let us not forget that **the generalized**

celebration of Mass facing the people is a great contributing factor to loss of ritual.

This form of celebration had become widespread in the early 1960s and was nearly universal by 1964-65, so that the conciliar reform did not even need to legislate it. One might argue that the texts considered it to be an exception in theory (1), though it had all but become the rule. The new celebration, with its table-altar brought close to the faithful and on which rather everyday gestures are performed for everyone to see, is practically of a piece with the *versus populum* posture, as is made evident by the violent reactions any invitation to abandon it has elicited (2).

Whereas the traditional Latin and Greek liturgies paradoxically allow one to touch the supernatural by underscoring through gesture and word the transcendence of the mystery they reveal while veiling it in a sort of continual interplay between distance and closeness (3), the clear result of all of the reform's "insertions into life" is a sense of a lowered transcendence of the message.

(1) See Cyrille Dounot, "Plaidoyer pour la célébration ad orientem," *L'Homme nouveau*, 3 December 2016, 11.

(2) See those elicited by the July 5, 2016 keynote address delivered by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, opening the *Sacra Liturgia* conference in London.

(3) See Martin Mosebach, *The Heresy of Formlessness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).