

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 26 published 12 March 2012

BISHOP SCHNEIDER AND THE LITURGY: MILESTONES FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

On 15 January 2012, the Parisian association Réunicatho, which came into being shortly after the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, held its fourth meeting for Catholic unity. We here present an unabridged translation of the keynote address given by the conference's guest of honor, Bishop Athanasius Schneider, on the theme of "The Extraordinary Form and the New Evangelization."

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(headings added by the editors)

I - Turning our gaze towards Christ

In order to speak of new evangelization correctly, it is necessary first to turn our gaze towards Him Who is the true evangelizer, namely Our Lord and Saviour Jesus-Christ, the Word of God made Man. The Son of God came upon this earth to expiate and redeem the greatest sin, sin par excellence. And this sin, humanity's sin par excellence, consists in refusing to adore God, in refusing to keep the first place, the place of honor, for Him. This sin on the part of man consists in not paying attention to God, in no longer having a sense of the fittingness of things, or even a sense of the details pertaining to God and to the Adoration that is His due, in not wanting to see God, in not wanting to kneel before God.

For such an attitude, the incarnation of God is an embarrassment; as a result the real presence of God in the Eucharistic mystery is likewise an embarrassment; the centrality of the Eucharistic presence of God in our churches is an embarrassment. Indeed sinful man wants the center stage for himself, whether within the Church or during the Eucharistic celebration; he wants to be seen, to be noticed.

For this reason Jesus the Eucharist, God incarnate, present in the tabernacle under the Eucharistic form, is set aside. Even the representation of the Crucified One on the cross in the middle of the altar during the celebration facing the people is an embarrassment, for it might eclipse the priest's face. Therefore the image of the Crucified One in the center of the altar as well as Jesus the Eucharist in the tabernacle, also in the center of the altar, are an embarrassment. Consequently, the cross and the tabernacle are moved to the side. During mass, the congregation must be able to see the priest's face at all times, and he delights in placing himself literally at the center of the house of God. And if perchance Jesus the Eucharist is still left in His tabernacle in the middle of the altar because the Ministry of Historical Monuments—even in an atheist regime—has forbidden moving it for the conservation of artistic heritage, the priest, often throughout the entire Eucharistic celebration, does not scruple to turn his back to Him.

How often have good and faithful adorers of Christ cried out in their simplicity and humility : "God bless you, Ministry of Historical Monuments ! At least you have left us Jesus in the center of our church."

II - The Mass is intended to give glory to God, not to men

Only on the basis of adoring and glorifying God can the Church adequately proclaim the word of the truth, i.e., evangelize. Before the world ever heard Jesus, the eternal Word made flesh, preach and proclaim the Kingdom, He quietly adored for thirty years. This remains forever the law for the Church's life and action as well as for all evangelizers. "The way the liturgy is treated decides the fate of the Faith and of the Church," said Cardinal Ratzinger, our current Holy Father Benedict XVI. The Second Vatican Council intended to remind the Church what reality and what action were to take the first place in her life. This is the reason

for which the first of the Council's documents was dedicated to the liturgy. The Council gives us the following principles: in the Church, and therefore in the liturgy, the human must be oriented towards the divine and be subordinate to it; likewise the visible in relation to the invisible, action in relation to contemplation, the present in relation to the future city to which we aspire (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2). According to the teaching of Vatican II our earthly liturgy participates in a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy of the holy city of Jerusalem (*ibid.*, 2).

Everything about the liturgy of the Holy Mass must therefore serve to express clearly the reality of Christ's sacrifice, namely the prayers of adoration, of thanks, of expiation, and of impetration that the eternal High Priest presented to His Father.

The rite and every detail of the Holy Sacrifice of the mass must center on glorifying and adoring God by insisting on the centrality of Christ's presence, whether in the sign and representation of the Crucified or in His Eucharistic presence in the tabernacle, and especially at the moment of the Consecration and of Holy Communion. The more this is respected, the less man takes center stage in the celebration, the less the celebration looks like a circle closed in on itself. Rather, it is opened out on to Christ as in a procession advancing towards Him with the priest at its head; such a liturgical procession will more truly reflect the sacrifice of adoration of Christ crucified; the fruits deriving from God's glorification received into the souls of those in attendance will be richer; God will honor them more.

The more the priest and the faithful truthfully seek the glory of God rather than that of men in Eucharistic celebrations and do not seek to receive glory from each other, the more God will honor them by granting that their soul may participate more intensely and fruitfully in the Glory and Honor of His divine life.

At present and in various places on earth there are many celebrations of the Holy Mass regarding which one might say, as an inversion of Psalm 113:9: "To us, O Lord, and to our name give glory." To such celebrations apply Jesus' words: "How can you believe, who receive glory one from another: and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?" (Jn 5:44).

III -The Six Principles of the Liturgical Reform

The Second Vatican Council put forward the following principles regarding a liturgical reform:

1. During the liturgical celebration, the human, the temporal, and action must be directed towards the divine, the eternal, and contemplation; the role of the former must be subordinated to the latter (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2).
2. During the liturgical celebration, the realization that the earthly liturgy participates in the heavenly liturgy will have to be encouraged (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8).
3. There must be absolutely no innovation, therefore no new creation of liturgical rites, especially in the rite of Mass, unless it is for a true and certain gain for the Church, and provided that all is done prudently and, if it is warranted, that new forms replace the existing ones organically (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 23).
4. The rites of Mass must be such that the sacred is more explicitly addressed (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 21).
5. Latin must be preserved in the liturgy, especially in Holy Mass (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 36 and 54).
6. Gregorian chant has pride of place in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 116).

The Council Fathers saw their reform proposals as the continuation of the reform of Saint Pius X (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 112 and 117) and of the servant of God Pius XII; indeed, in the liturgical constitution, Pius XII's Encyclical *Mediator Dei* is what is most often cited.

Among other things, Pope Pius XII left the Church an important principle of doctrine regarding the Holy Liturgy, namely the condemnation of what is called liturgical archeologism. Its proposals largely overlapped with those of the Jansenistic and Protestant-leaning synod of Pistoia (see "*Mediator Dei*," 63-64). As a matter of fact they bring to mind Martin Luther's theological thinking.

For this reason, already the Council of Trent condemned Protestant liturgical ideas, in particular the exaggerated emphasis on the notion of banquet in the eucharistic celebration to the detriment of its sacrificial character and the suppression of univocal signs of sacrality as an expression of the mystery of the liturgy (see Council of Trent, session 22).

The magisterium's doctrinal declarations on the liturgy, as in this case those of the Council of Trent and of the encyclical *Mediator Dei* and which are reflected in a centuries-old, or even millenia-old, liturgical praxis, these declarations I say, form part of that element of Holy Tradition that one cannot abandon without incurring grave spiritual damage. Vatican II took up these doctrinal declarations on the liturgy, as one can see by reading the general principals of divine worship in the liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

As an example of a concrete error in the thought and action of liturgical action, Pope Pius XII cites the proposal to give to the altar the shape of table (*Mediator Dei* 62). If already Pope Pius XII refused the table-shaped altar, one imagines how much more he would have refused the proposal for a celebration around a table "versus populum"!

When Sacrosanctum Concilium 2 teaches that, in the liturgy, contemplation has the priority and that the entire celebration must be oriented to the heavenly mysteries (ibid. 2 and 8), it is faithfully echoing the following declaration of the Council of Trent: “And whereas such is the nature of man, that, without external helps, he cannot easily be raised to the meditation of divine things; therefore has holy Mother Church instituted certain rites, to wit that certain things be pronounced in the mass in a low, and others in a louder, tone. She has likewise employed ceremonies, such as mystic benedictions, lights, incense, vestments, and many other things of this kind, derived from an apostolic discipline and tradition, whereby both the majesty of so great a sacrifice might be recommended, and the minds of the faithful be excited, by those visible signs of religion and piety, to the contemplation of those most sublime things which are hidden in this sacrifice” (Session 24, chap. 5).

The Church’s magisterial teachings quoted above, especially *Mediator Dei*, were certainly recognized as fully valid by the Fathers of the Council. Therefore they must continue to be fully valid for all of the Church’s children even today.

IV -The five wounds of the liturgical mystical body of Christ

In the letter to all the bishops of the Catholic Church that Benedict XVI sent with the 7 July 2007 *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, the Pope made the following important declaration: “In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too.” In saying this the Pope expressed the fundamental principle of the liturgy that the Council of Trent, Pope Pius XII, and the Second Vatican Council had taught.

Taking an unprejudiced and objective look at the liturgical practice of the overwhelming majority of churches throughout the Catholic world where the Ordinary Form of the Roman rite is used, no one can honestly deny that the six aforementioned liturgical principles of Vatican II are never, or hardly ever, respected, despite the erroneous claim that such is the liturgical practice that Vatican II desired. There is a certain number of concrete aspects of the currently prevailing liturgical practice in the ordinary rite that represent a veritable rupture with a constant and millennium-old liturgical practice. By this I mean the five liturgical practices I shall mention shortly; they may be termed the five wounds of the liturgical mystical body of Christ. These are wounds, for they amount to a violent break with the past since they deemphasize the sacrificial character (which is actually the central and essential character of the Mass) and put forward the notion of banquet. All of this diminishes the exterior signs of divine adoration, for it brings out the heavenly and eternal dimension of the mystery to a far lesser degree.

Now the five wounds (except for the new Offertory prayers) are those that are not envisaged in the ordinary form of the rite of Mass but were brought into it through the practice of a deplorable fashion.

A) The first and most obvious wound is the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass in which the priest celebrates with his face turned towards the faithful, especially during the Eucharistic prayer and the consecration, the highest and most sacred moment of the worship that is God’s due. This exterior form corresponds, by its very nature, more to the way in which one teaches a class or shares a meal. We are in a closed circle. And this form absolutely does not conform to the moment of the prayer, less yet to that of adoration. And yet Vatican II did not want this form by any means; nor has it ever been recommended by the Magisterium of the Popes since the Council. Pope Benedict wrote in the preface to the first volume of his collected works: “[t]he idea that the priest and the people in prayer must look at one another reciprocally was born only in the modern age and is completely foreign to ancient Christianity. In fact, the priest and the people do not address their prayer to one another, but together they address it to the one Lord. For this reason they look in the same direction in prayer: either towards the East as the cosmic symbol of the Lord’s return, or where this is not possible, towards an image of Christ in the apse, towards a cross, or simply upwards.”

The form of celebration in which all turn their gaze in the same direction (*conversi ad orientem, ad Crucem, ad Dominum*) is even mentioned in the rubrics of the new rite of the Mass (see *Ordo Missae*, 25, 133, 134). The so-called “*versus populum*” celebration certainly does not correspond to the idea of the Holy Liturgy as mentioned in the declaration of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2 and 8.

B) The second wound is communion in the hand, which is now spread nearly throughout the entire world. Not only was this manner of receiving communion in no way mentioned by the Vatican II Council Fathers, but it was in fact introduced by a certain number of bishops in disobedience to the Holy See and in spite of the negative majority vote by bishops in 1968. Pope Paul VI legitimized it only later, reluctantly, and under specific conditions.

Pope Benedict XVI, since *Corpus Christi* 2008, distributes Communion to the faithful kneeling and on their tongue only, both in Rome and also in all the local churches he visits. He thus is showing the entire Church a clear example of practical Magisterium in a liturgical matter. Since the qualified majority of the bishops refused Communion in the hand as something harmful three years after the Council, how much more the Council Fathers would have done so!

C) The third wound is the new Offertory prayers. They are an entirely new creation and had never been used in the Church. They do less to express the mystery of the sacrifice of the Cross than that of a banquet; thus they recall the prayers of the Jewish Sabbath meal. In the more than thousand-year tradition of the

Church in both East and West, the Offertory prayers have always been expressly oriented to the mystery of the sacrifice of the Cross (see e.g. Paul Tirot, *Histoire des prières d'offertoire dans la liturgie romaine du VIIème au XVIème siècle* [Rome, 1985]). There is no doubt that such an absolutely new creation contradicts the clear formulation of Vatican II that states: "Innovationes ne fiant . . . novae formae ex formis iam exstantibus organice crescant" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 23).

D) The fourth wound is the total disappearance of Latin in the huge majority of Eucharistic celebrations in the Ordinary Form in all Catholic countries. This is a direct infraction against the decisions of Vatican II.

E) The fifth wound is the exercise of the liturgical services of lector and acolyte by women as well as the exercise of these same services in lay clothing while entering into the choir during Holy Mass directly from the space reserved to the faithful. This custom has never existed in the Church, or at least has never been welcome. It confers to the celebration of the Catholic Mass the exterior character of informality, the character and style of a rather profane assembly. The second council of Nicaea, already in 787, forbade such practices when it laid down the following canon: "If someone is not ordained, it is not permitted for him to do the reading from the ambo during the holy liturgy" (can. 14). This norm has been constantly followed in the Church. Only subdeacons and lectors were allowed to give the reading during the liturgy of the Mass. If lectors and acolytes are missing, men or boys in liturgical vestments may do so, not women, since the male sex symbolically represents the last link to minor orders from the point of view of the non-sacramental ordination of lectors and acolytes.

The texts of Vatican II never mention the suppression of the minor orders and of the subdiaconate or the introduction of new ministries. In Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 28, the Council distinguishes "minister" from "fidelis" during the liturgical celebration, and it stipulates that each may do only what pertains to him by the nature of the liturgy. Number 29 mentions the "ministrantes", that is the altar servers who have not been ordained. In contrast to them, there are, in keeping with the juridical terms in use at that time, the "ministri," that is to say those who have received an order, be it major or minor.

V -The Motu Proprio: putting an end to rupture in the liturgy

In the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum*, Pope Benedict XVI stipulates that the two forms of the Roman rite are to be regarded and treated with the same respect, because the Church remains the same before and after the Council. In the letter accompanying the *Motu Proprio*, the pope wishes the two forms to enrich each other mutually. Furthermore he wishes that the new form "be able to demonstrate, more powerfully than has been the case hitherto, the sacrality which attracts many people to the former usage."

Four of the liturgical wounds, or unfortunate practices (celebration versus populum, communion in the hand, total abandonment of Latin and of Gregorian chant, and intervention of women for the service of lectorship and of acolyte), have in and of themselves nothing to do with the Ordinary Form of the Mass and moreover are in contradiction with the liturgical principles of Vatican II. If an end were put to these practices, we would get back to the true teaching of Vatican II. And then, the two forms of the Roman rite would come considerably closer so that, at least outwardly, there would be no rupture to speak of between them and, therefore, no rupture between the Church before and after the Council either.

As concerns the new Offertory prayers, it would be desirable for the Holy See to replace them with the corresponding prayers of the extraordinary form, or at least to allow for the use of the latter *ad libitum*. In this way the rupture between the two forms would be avoided not only externally but also internally. Rupture in the liturgy is precisely what the Council Fathers did not want. The Council's minutes attest to this, because throughout the two thousand years of the liturgy's history, there has never been a liturgical rupture and, therefore, there never can be. On the other hand there must be continuity, just as it is fitting for the Magisterium to be in continuity.

The five wounds of the Church's liturgical body I have mentioned are crying out for healing. They represent a rupture that one may compare to the exile in Avignon. The situation of so sharp a break in an expression of the Church's life is far from unimportant—back then the absence of the popes from Rome, today the visible break between the liturgy before and after the Council. This situation indeed cries out for healing.

For this reason we need new saints today, one or several Saint Catherines of Siena. We need the "vox populi fidelis" demanding the suppression of this liturgical rupture. The tragedy in all of this is that, today as back in the time of the Avignon exile, a great majority of the clergy, especially in its higher ranks, is content with this rupture.

Before we can expect efficacious and lasting fruits from the new evangelization, a process of conversion must get under way within the Church. How can we call others to convert while, among those doing the calling, no convincing conversion towards God has yet occurred, internally or externally? The sacrifice of the Mass, the sacrifice of adoration of Christ, the greatest mystery of the Faith, the most sublime act of adoration is celebrated in a closed circle where people are looking at each other.

What is missing is "conversio ad Dominum." It is necessary, even externally and physically. Since in the liturgy Christ is treated as though he were not God, and

he is not given clear exterior signs of the adoration that is due to God alone because the faithful receive Holy Communion standing and, to boot, take it into their hands like any other food, grasping it with their fingers and placing it into their mouths themselves. There is here a sort of Eucharistic Arianism or Semi-Arianism.

One of the necessary conditions for a fruitful new evangelization would be the witness of the entire Church in the public liturgical worship. It would have to observe at least these two aspects of Divine Worship:

- 1) Let the Holy Mass be celebrated the world over, even in the ordinary form, in an internal and therefore necessarily also external “*conversio ad Dominum*”.
- 2) Let the faithful bend the knee before Christ at the time of Holy Communion, as Saint Paul demands when he mentions the name and person of Christ (see Phil 2:10), and let them receive Him with the greatest love and the greatest respect possible, as befits Him as true God.

Thank God, Benedict XVI has taken two concrete measures to begin the process of a return from the liturgical Avignon exile, to wit the *Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum* and the reintroduction of the traditional Communion rite.

There still is need for many prayers and perhaps for a new Saint Catherine of Sienna for the other steps to be taken to heal the five wounds on the Church’s liturgical and mystical body and for God to be venerated in the liturgy with that love, that respect, that sense of the sublime that have always been the hallmark of the Church and of her teaching, especially in the Council of Trent, Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Vatican II in its Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and Pope Benedict XVI in his theology of the liturgy, in his liturgical magisterium, and in the *Motu Proprio* mentioned above.

No one can evangelize unless he has first adored, or better yet unless he adores constantly and gives God, Christ the Eucharist, true priority in his way of celebrating and in all of his life. Indeed, to quote Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger: “It is in the treatment of the liturgy that the fate of the Faith and of the Church is decided.”

*Bishop Athanasius Schneider,
Réunicatho, 15 January 2012*