

THUS SPEAKS RATZINGER

By Fr. John W. Mole O.M.I.

Among the present ills which plague the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Ratzinger is primarily attentive to the collapse of her liturgy. This for him is where remedial measures must begin. A right relationship with God, ensured by sound liturgy, must precede all else.

The voice of concern which Ratzinger raises is as solitary as it is oracular. Other prelates may be of a like mind but remain silent. The problem has surfaced at Roman Synods of Bishops, only to be brushed aside. Ratzinger himself was rendered speechless when Paul VI, in order to make room for his *Novus Ordo*, virtually abolished the prevailing liturgy. It was only in his 1998 memoirs that he revealed how thunderstruck he had been in 1969 by the rupture of continuity in organic development of the liturgy. Once he was elevated to the episcopate (1977.) he spoke from time to time about matters liturgical. Later he compiled selections of his discourses into two books: *Feast of Faith*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco (German ed., 1981) and *A New Song for the Lord*, Crossroad, New York (German ed., 1995). A third book followed, this time written from start to finish as a systematic whole, entitled *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Ignatius Press (Gennan ed., 1999).

During the last four centuries, the subject has been approached either in terms of “liturgical movement” or “liturgical reform.” Ratzinger shows a predilection for the former and refers to the latter usually in a problematical context. In fact, “reformism” in his vocabulary is rather pejorative. In the 16th century, it really meant “revolt” against the Roman Mass. 18th century reformism, whether inspired by the Enlightenment, Gallicanism, Jansenism or Josephinism was also anti-Roman. The term “liturgical movement” apparently came into its own in the 19th century when Dom Gueranger applied it to the restoration of the Roman Rite and its apotheosis of sacred Gregorian music. His liturgical movement was taken under the aegis of the Holy See by Pope St. Pius X and during the sixty years between his famous *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini* of 1903 until the Second Vatican Council, flourished and gathered momentum..

As for the Second Vatican Council the key word of its Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is not reform but the *instauratio* of St. Pius X, re-emphasized by Pius XI. It comes from St. Paul's *instaurare omnia in Christo* which obviously refers to the

future. Hence the verb *instaurare* should not be taken to mean “to restore” but rather “to orient.”

Vatican II reformers claimed to be motivated by pastoral considerations. Indeed, they were recruited preferably from the three Pastoral Centres of Liturgy: Paris, Trier (Germany) and Notre Dame, Indiana, USA “Pragmatic” rather than “pastoral” is Ratzinger's *mot juste* for the reformism preceding and following the Second Vatican Council (cf. for instance the opening sentence of the preface to his second book, p. ix).

Ratzinger's writings on the liturgy mainly divide into theory as to its inner nature and practices which manifest it outwardly. What follows is similarly divided.

Feast of Faith (1981)

St. Thomas Aquinas begins each topic of his *Summa Theologica* by allowing negators to have the first word. The question- “Does God exist?” - immediately prompts his remark: “Apparently not,” followed by three formidable arguments in support. He then gives his own response, after which he deals with the objections. Ratzinger extends a similar courtesy to the opposition.

The *via negativa* introducing the first book is provided by no less than a member of St. Thomas' own Dominican Order who reduces God to the level of being nothing but the impulse within man to improve himself. He who responds to this stimulus can “transcend” himself. Ratzinger, after noting the growing influence of this pathetic state of mind today, asserts, “On the other hand, we are obliged to state firmly that this is not Christian theology. For the prime characteristic of Christian faith is that it is faith in God. Furthermore, that this God is someone who speaks, someone to whom man can speak. The Christian God is characterized by revelation, that is, in the words and deeds in which he addresses man. And the goal of revelation is man's response in word and deed which thus expands revelation into a dialogue” (p. 16).

The prayerlessness of western man, whether caused by apathy or by the illusion of “self-transcendence,” is in marked contrast to the prayerfulness of Asiatic religious adherents who seek union with God by renouncing individualism. However, their goal is to be absorbed into the divinity by sinking into nothingness like drops of rain losing their identity by falling into the ocean. Christians should likewise renounce the self-centeredness of the isolated ego. But for them the object of prayer is to enter into

an interpersonal relationship with God, given that He confers personhood, together with existence, on each human being. Moreover, Christ, in receiving his followers into his mystical body, the Church, enables them to overcome egoism and practice detachment from worldly pleasures. Ratzinger finally concludes that “the present age will have to decide ultimately between the Asiatic religious view and Christian faith” (p. 24).

Ratzinger then asks “What is the liturgy?” This question is implicit in his title insofar as it prompts us to enquire why faith and festivity go together. It is because liturgical celebration is a rejoicing in the uttermost kind of freedom - freedom from sin and its consequence, death. Christ pays our debt and, in joining us to himself; restores us to a friendship with God greater than that of man when first created.

Prayer as an interpersonal relationship between man and God is revealed especially by the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John: “In the beginning was the Word (Logos) and the Word was towards God and the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.” The habitual translation “And the Word was with God” does not, according to Ratzinger, render precisely the Greek preposition *pros*, which is “toward” rather than “with.” The interlocutory relationship of man and God, brought about by the Word becoming flesh, is likewise towards.

From the tremendous premise that “the logos of God is the ontological foundation of prayer,” Ratzinger expounds beautifully on how the Word made flesh draws man into divine dialogue. This prepares the way for the following discourse on the form and content of the liturgy. The theology of the liturgy thus begins to stand forth grandly with what Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* of 1947 calls the *culmen et fons* (summit and source) of the liturgy, namely the Eucharistic celebration. This discourse is both positive and precipitous. The brink is alluded to by Ratzinger at the outset: “If we want to understand the current problems of liturgical reform, we will need to recall a largely forgotten debate which took place between the two World Wars and which is at the centre of these issues” (p. 33). The English translator somewhat obscures the peril by using the word “debate” instead of what Ratzinger really means, namely “quarrel.” What indeed happened between the Wars was a withdrawal into mutually exclusive camps which hardened at the approach of the Council into the traditional/progressive dichotomy. On one side are those who sought to determine the form (*gestalt*) of the liturgy in order to conform themselves to it, For those on the other side, the search for “form” elicited “reform” and the desire to conform the

liturgy to themselves. This kind of reformism erupted vehemently after the Council. As for Ratzinger, the real dichotomy he warns against is that between true and false.

A New Song for the Lord (1995)

Whereas the focus of the first book is on: “whatness,” that of the 1995 book is on “who-ness.” It thus aligns itself with the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) and the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963) of Vatican II which define the liturgy primarily as the exercise of the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Each sacrament is an *actus Christi*, no matter by whom it may actually be administered.

There is identity between what Jesus does and who he is. His declaration “I am the way, the truth and the life” does not mean merely “I show the way, speak the truth and give life.” It means “I am that which I do.” He does not merely praise, He is the praise, of His Heavenly Father. He is the liturgy. For this reason, Ratzinger inveighs strongly and repeatedly against the notion that the active participation enjoined by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #21 consists in role-playing in the manner of actors who take part in a play” The priest in the sanctuary effaces himself in order to function in *persona Christi* and those who assist him must be, or at least be eligible to be, ordained or installed so that there can be self-effacement as well as identity between what they are and what they do.

The first known Latin word for the Mass identifies Christ with his action. It is the compact and energetic term *Doininicus* which implies what the Lord does on the Lord's Day. Ratzinger highlights his second book with the story of a group of Christians arrested for assisting at Mass in a North African town. This occurred in 304 AD. during the persecution of the Emperor Domitian. The owner of the dwelling where the Mass took place, on being asked at the trial why he had allowed this infringement of the imperial edict, replied simply, *Sine Dominico non possumus*: “We cannot do without what the Lord does on the Lord's Day” (p. 60). In effect it was useless to threaten him and his friends with death because they could not live anyway without the Mass.

This book's principal dissertation is about how Ratzinger concluded a week-long symposium at Madrid in 1989 on the subject of Jesus Christ Today. Scholars from different communions and various cities of Europe took part. After his death and resurrection, Jesus was perceived by those who saw him reappear as “Jesus yesterday,

today and the same forever.” Because He is risen, He is encountered as Jesus Christ Today. At the same time, He is perceived as the historical personage of yesterday; whose words and deeds are related by the Gospel. At the same time, He is perceived eschatologically as the One who is to come again in glory.

This being an ecumenical occasion. Ratzinger could not bring the Catholic liturgy explicitly into the picture. Nonetheless it is clear that it is thanks to His presence in the Eucharistic celebration that our participation therein is a meeting with Jesus Christ Today.

The Spirit of the Liturgy (1999)

The 1981 and 1995 books focus, in their theoretical parts, on “What?” and “Who?”. That of 1999 expands the question of “what-ness” panoramically to the dimensions of “Whence it comes?” and “Whither it goes?”.

The first chapter envisages the twin peaks of the Old Testament: Creation and Covenant. Even if the first page opens with the question “What is the liturgy?” this is only preliminary in order to dispose of the “play” or “game” theory. There are points of comparison especially when children are at play, in which case there is the element of preparing for later life. As participants in the earthly liturgy, we are children preparing for the liturgy of heaven. But the point that Ratzinger chiefly makes here is that one does not play games with God. How true liturgy was to begin was revealed on Mount Sinai. But before the people of Israel could leave Egypt, negotiations had to take place between Moses and Pharaoh. For the latter, this consisted in a game of political compromise. But Moses stood his ground: there can be no compromise with God. Israel must go forth into the wilderness, men, women and flocks, and journey to the place appointed for the meeting with God. When this took place at Mount Sinai, the rules of worship were handed down together with the Ten Commandments and the Covenant. However, as Moses was detained for a considerable time at the summit, the people below grew impatient and devised their own mode of worship around the golden calf. So they too attempted to play games with God and were chastised.

The particular relationship between God and a particular people was intended to lead to an eventual union with the whole of humanity. The second chapter is therefore an overview of all world religions and philosophies. Included is the hubris of Gnostic

systems, the elitist exclusivity of which leaves in the lurch those who lack the knowledge they require for salvation. Many who are so deprived put their hopes in the transmigration of souls. Mention is also made of the eccentric cosmology of Teilhard de Chardin. From the welter of beliefs and ideals, the best rationale which emerges is the theory of exitus and reditus (going forth and returning.) Its greatest exponent is the philosopher Plotinus who lived at Rome in the second century. The idea of sacrifice is closely associated with that of reditus. Indeed, Ratzinger says: "In all religions sacrifice is the heart of worship" (p. 27).

Exitus viewed by Plotinus is catastrophic: a downward plunge from divinity into an ever increasing remoteness from it. On the other hand, exodus viewed in the light of biblical faith as creation is an act of freedom and love on God's part. Each creative act is followed by the refrain, "God saw it and it was good." Also, not willing to be loved by robots, he endowed man with free will. This allowed tragedy to enter in that it was used not to return God's love but to turn away from it. God responded with a still greater love, sending His eternal Son to become man and effect a still greater reditus in love. Another Christian correction of the Plotinian reditus was the two-dimensional movement, horizontal as well as vertical or "cross-shaped" dimension. A movement that is both lateral and vertical is circular. So the Christian reditus is to be imaged as a great circle, with smaller circles of individual lives, as well as those of communities and cultures; within it.

The third and final chapter brings us in sight of the highest peak towards which all the eyes of all the religions of the world are raised: peace between heaven and earth obtained through atonement, hence sacrifice.

But there are two kinds of sacrifice: replacement and representation. The sacrificial systems in which the offerings are animals and first fruits of the harvest fall into the category of replacement. All religions recognize the decadence of man and that therefore worship entails atonement, propitiation, reconciliation. The only meaningful gift that man can make is of himself. But he replaces himself by offering first fruits of crops and slain animals. In spite of the insufficiency of such sacrifice, God initially accepts it until man can learn how to offer a perfect sacrifice. God gives an early intimation of the truly representative sacrifice by ordering Abraham to sacrifice his only son and, at the last minute, intervenes to substitute a lamb. The Passover sacrifice of the lamb as a ransom from the death of the first-born was also prophetic of the Cross of the Word made flesh, the true Lamb of God.

Discoursing on replacement and representation leads into a truly sublime chapter in which Ratzinger deploys to the utmost his spiritual and theological genius.

So much for theory. The other three parts of *The Spirit of the Liturgy* are concerned with practices.

Second Part

In this second part our focus is on liturgical practices and the changes that began to be made with rapidity and radicality even before the Second Vatican Council had reached its end. Whereas sacraments are “outward signs of inward grace,” the rituals which accompany them are “outward signs of what the liturgy is inwardly.” Sacramentality is of theological import. Liturgical changes should therefore not be motivated merely for sociological reasons. This is Ratzinger's main approach to the question of the advisability of liturgical change. He considers that theological criteria have been neglected to an extent that “a reform of the reform” is needed. Cardinals Ottaviani and Seper, his predecessors in the office of Prefect of Faith, both objected vehemently to the *modus procedendi* of the postconciliar reformers.

To implement the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of Vatican II Paul VI appointed in 1964 what he called a *Consilium* of bishops and two hundred experts under the control of his chief artisan of reform, the Vincentian priest Annibale Bugnini. Five years later, he gave Bugnini still more power by erecting the *Consilium* into a new Congregation of Divine Worship. In 1975, sadly disillusioned, he abruptly dissolved the new Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and handed back jurisdiction over the liturgy to the Congregation of Rites set up for the purpose in 1588. It was now renamed the Congregation of Divine Worship. Bugnini was sent into exile as papal representative to Iran.

The best indication so far of what went wrong is to be found in a post mortem compilation of the journal entries and other writings of an excellent and highly competent witness. It was published in 1998 under the title *11 Card. Ferdinando Antonelli e gli sviluppi della riforma liturgica dal 1948 al 1970*, *Studia Anselmiana*, Roma, by Nicola Giampietro, O.F.M. Cap., and reviewed in *Osservatore Romano* as authoritative. Antonelli was appointed in 1948, together with Bugnini, to Pius XII's Liturgical Commission. He was also an episcopal member of Paul VI's *Consilium* and finally promoted to the cardinalate. He mainly concluded that the *Consilium* as a

body and Bugnini in particular were theologically incompetent. Presumably Ratzinger would not fault them for this deficiency, given that the theology of the liturgy was then in its infancy and had yet to develop the necessary theological criteria. The fault should rather be imputed to the precipitation with which the Consilium proceeded, goaded on by Bugnini whose bureaucratic genius was coupled with a crash-programme mentality.

A general norm stipulated in article 23 of Sacrosanctum Consilium is that liturgical change must be governed by theological, historical and pastoral criteria.

An order of importance must surely be inferred: first theological, secondly historical and lastly, pastoral. Bugnini's own 900-page book *La Riforma liturgica 1948-1975* (Edizione liturgiche, Roma, 1983) written to prove the honesty of his stewardship, leaves a clear impression that he put all his eggs into the pastoral basket.

Ratzinger gave evidence of his brilliance as a theologian as a peritus of the Second Vatican Council. Now famed as a protagonist of the wisdom of its decisions, the importance of SC 23 must loom large in his view. His three books are intended as a contribution to the development of a theology of the liturgy. This presages a new era for the liturgical movement, hitherto somewhat restricted to historical studies.

For the rest, we will limit ourselves to instances of change which are to be regarded not as renewal by the roots but as wrenching from the soil. Eradication, not radicality, is the word for it.

Orientation

The abolition of the practice of priest and people together facing east (i.e. the *oriens*) during the Eucharistic prayer is of grave consequence. Ratzinger attributes the rapidity and unanimity with which this happened to the oblivion into which theological and historical reasons for it had fallen during the century prior to Vatican II (cf *Feast of Faith*, p. 142). Real reform here would consist in the restoration of the knowledge which the faithful had unfortunately lost. Instead, the choice has been to assume a “pastoral” need to obliterate this knowledge still more completely by having priest and people eyeball each other.

The notion that the Eucharistic celebration calls for a face to face situation results from reductively conceiving the liturgy as consisting in the grouping of individuals into a community. Escaping from the isolation experienced in modern city life by banding into a happy “togetherness” is what they think the liturgy is about. In truth, the liturgy must be conceived as a cosmic action. Liturgy is the exercise of the priesthood of Christ (SC 7) who embraces, in his act of praising his Father, not only mankind but its entire habitat, the cosmos. This liturgy is not only cosmic but directional, that is, oriented towards the rising sun as the symbol of his resurrection. Moreover, it is oriented towards “the sign of the Son of Man” which is to appear in the East to herald his second glorious coming.

Music - artistic or utilitarian?

Ratzinger dwells at length in all three books on the subject of sacred music. This is congenial to the accomplished pianist that he is. Moreover, his family name is associated with Regensburg, Europe's celebrated centre of sacred music. For there his priest brother George was kappelmeister for thirty years. A discourse entitled “The Tradition of Regensburg” is included in his second book. Given on the retirement of his brother George in 1994, it maintains that the Ratzinger period (i.e. the period George Ratzinger was at Regensburg) had been in faithful continuity with the Gregorian movement launched by Pope St. Pius X in 1903.

Ratzinger's treatise “On the Theological Basis of Church Music” in his first book opens with the following via negativa: “It is astonishing to find that in the German edition of the documents of Vatican II edited by Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler ... the chapter on the Constitution on the Liturgy begins with the observation that genuine art, as found in Church music, is ‘of its very nature ... hardly to be reconciled with the nature of the liturgy and the basic principle of liturgical reform’” (p. 97).

Ratzinger says further that there was discrepancy “between what the Council said and how it has been taken up by the postconciliar Church” (p. 99). This treatise must be read in order to grasp the intricacies of the question involved in “the tension between the demands of art and the simplicity of the liturgy” (p. 99). Ratzinger's position, stated at the outset, is that seeking simplicity by resorting to utilitarianism inevitably results in the impoverishment of the liturgy. Banality becomes the order of the day.

Rite

Not a few reformers of our postconciliar period share with their forerunners of the 16th and 18th centuries an antipathy for the Roman Rite. The chapter entitled “Rite” in *The Spirit of the Liturgy* begins with the remark that for many people today “the word rite does not have a good ring to it” (p. 159). They regard it as synonymous with rigidity and detrimental to the creativity which for them is the hallmark of liturgical reform. Ratzinger retorts that “creativity cannot be an authentic category for matters liturgical. In any case, this is a word that developed within the Marxist world view. Creativity means that in a universe that in itself is meaningless and came into existence through blind evolution, man can creatively fashion a new and better world” (p. 168).

The right way to worship God spread originally from the apostolic sees of Antioch, Alexandria and Rome; to which was soon added Byzantium. These four centres then radiated true worship to the four quarters of the cosmos. There was a subsequent differentiation into other rites. The plurality of rites has come about through the adaptation of Christian worship to differences in the cultures of various regions.

Sacrosanctum Concilium must be understood as maintaining Latinity as an essential component of the Roman Rite and belonging to its “substantial unity” (art. 38). Although it is obvious that Latin must be used to an extent that renders possible the full exercise of its influence, it has been allowed to lapse almost into complete disuse. Ratzinger occasionally alludes but does not confront this subject squarely. He probably considers it too delicate, considering that there is dissension in this matter even within the Holy See. Eventually, the development of a theology of the liturgy will provide the criteria to deal with problems of purity of doctrine which the trend towards hundreds and hundreds of vernacular tongues will inevitably pose. One problem with which he deals is whether the language of the Canon of the Mass should be loud or sotto voce. Prior to the postconciliar reform, the silence, after the singing of the Sanctus and Benedictus was a profoundly pregnant experience during which the people became deeply recollected as the time for Communion approached. Ratzinger considers that the abolition of this practice brought about great loss. He first raised this question in 1978 and met with a barrage of criticism. His position remains adamant.

Kneeling

“There are groups, of no small influence, who are trying to talk us out of kneeling” (Spirit of the Liturgy, p. 184). Ratzinger demonstrates thoroughly from Scripture and the example of Christ himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. that the absence of kneeling in worship is utterly alien to the Christian mind. The argument that this posture of humility is contrary to modern culture has no bearing. “Kneeling does not come from any culture - it comes from the Bible and its knowledge of God” (p. 185).

How the phobia for kneeling seeped into the Church is intimated in the first part of the chapter which contains farther on the section on kneeling. Entitled “The Body and the Liturgy,” its approach is Christocentric: “God himself has become man, become body and here, again and again, he comes through his body to us who live in the body. The whole event of the Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection and Second Coming is present as the way by which God draws man into cooperation with himself” (p. 173). This *actio divina* takes place as our Lord utters the oratio or Eucharistic Prayer through the lips of his priest. The Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II urges *participatio actuosa* of all present. That is, they are to take part actually in what God is accomplishing on their behalf “Unfortunately,” says Ratzinger, this participation “was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external, entailing a need for general activity, as if as many people as possible, as often as possible, should be visibly engaged in action.” Kneeling is perceived as immobilizing.

Our conclusion is aptly furnished by liturgists to whom Ratzinger's intervention in their field is unwelcome. Resistance in France is so virulent that no publishing house of that country dared to print the French version of his third book. Produced instead by a Swiss firm in the autumn of 2001, it met with great success. In July of that year, Ratzinger presided over a three-day symposium on the theology of the liturgy at the traditional French monastery of Fontgombault. Shortly afterwards a lengthy interview in the Parisian newspaper *La Croix* enabled Ratzinger to maintain his position vigorously in the French capital. This aroused the ire of the National Pastoral Centre of the Liturgy at Paris. From within the pages of its review *Maison-Dieu*, Jean-Marie Gy, O.P., liturgical consultant to the French episcopate, lobbed a derogatory piece at Ratzinger. A previous director of *Maison-Dieu*, the late Mgr. Martimort reacted in similar fashion when the traditional French monastery of Le Barroux translated and published a book of writings of Mgr. Klaus Gamber, director of the

Liturgical Institute at Regensburg. Ratzinger's eulogious tribute to Gamber's s genius was also included. The decrying by Gy and Mortimer of the liturgical tradition of Regensburg, upheld by Gamber and Ratzinger, indicates the acuity of the traditional/progressive dichotomy to be found today in la douce France.

The End.