

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITURGY

OF THE EUCHARIST

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translated by Lucy Yau



INTRODUCTION

The intention of this paper is to trace briefly the course of the development of the Roman Eucharistic Liturgy down through the centuries up to its most recent reform in 1970. By gleaning through pertinent historical data and focusing on a few seminal documents from the past, we hope to establish a cause and effect relationship that might lead to a better understanding of the how and why of our present Eucharistic Liturgy.

JESUS' LAST SUPPER

Jesus, at the Last Supper, took bread, gave thanks to the Father, broke the bread, and gave it to His disciples. In performing these same actions, the sacrifice of Jesus

on the cross and, consequently, His redemptive grace are actualized in the life of the Church to the present day. This is the understanding of the Eucharist that St. Paul communicates to the Corinthian community when he writes: "Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). For this reason, the Apostle exhorts us to "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, our spiritual worship" (Rm. 12:1). The bread and wine, fruit of man's labour united with God's grace, are once again consecrated as Christ's sacrifice and our sacrifice. This same reality is, of course, offered in different ways in different situations by His Church; however, it is in the "taking of the Bread" (the symbol of life-giving), the "giving thanks" to the Father for all that He gives us (in particular the salvific grace of Christ's sacrifice on the cross), the "breaking" and "giving" it to us which allows us, in the eating of the Bread of Life, to live in Christ and to make of our lives the prolongation and realization of His saving grace.

A SIMPLE LITURGY OF LIFE (1st to the 3rd Century)

During the first century and immediately after, the Church, living within a Jewish milieu, followed the Jewish custom of praying during meals. Although it is uncertain to what extent the Eucharist was involved, these meals were, at the very least, meals of thanksgiving, and quite probably "love" feasts. The prayers dating back to that time indicate a close relationship between giving thanks over the bread and wine and the practice of a living faith.

The Didache

The Didache contains the most ancient eucharistic prayer known to us. Essentially, it is a song of praise and blessing, much like those that can be found in the Old Testament and in Jewish liturgies which celebrate the wondrous acts of salvation that God has done for His chosen people. It is clear from the religious perspective of the New Testament that the Didache's subject matter is the supreme christian act of thanksgiving—the eucharistic celebration in memory of Christ the Saviour:

As for the eucharist, give thanks in this manner:

First, for the cup:
We give thee thanks, our Father,
For the holy wine of David, thy servant,
That thou hast revealed to us through Jesus, Thy Child.
 Glory to thee forever!
Next for the bread broken,
We give thee thanks, our Father,
For the life and the knowledge
That thou hast revealed to us through Jesus, Thy Child.
 Glory to thee forever!(2)

The First Apologia of St. Justin

The First Apologia of St. Justin was written in 150 AD and there is a clear record of the Mass liturgy of his time. He writes:

On Sunday, all came from the towns and surrounding countryside for the celebration. The memoirs of the apostles and prophets being read, there followed a sermon by the President of the Assembly, in which he encouraged the people to live according to the instructions of the Word of God. After this, all stood up and prayed for general needs; bread and wine (which was already mixed with water) was brought up, and the President prayed and gave thanks in his own way, to which all responded "Amen". The sharing of the consecrated bread followed, and part of the bread was taken by the deacon to give to those who were absent from the celebration. At the same time, the more well-to-do donated freely to a collection which was brought to the President to be used for the assistance of poor widows and orphans.

It is clear from the above quotation that the Sunday liturgy of that time was divided into two parts: the reading of the Word and the sacrificial meal. The readings were from the prophets and the apostles, with the gospel included, and this was followed by a sermon which explained and taught the Word of God. The prayer of the faithful called Christians to view themselves and the world in light of God's Word through the eyes of Christ, and invited them to pray humbly to God as their personal and communal response to

His Word. Following upon this, there was the offering of the people - the bread and wine symbolizing the offering of their own lives. The celebrant then prayed and gave thanks, re-enacting the sacrifice of Christ who offered His body and shed His blood on the cross. It is in the eating of this bread and in the drinking of this wine that Christ's salvific grace was received and the community transformed into a living sacrifice along with Him. The breaking and sharing of the thanksgiving food followed this thanksgiving prayer, confirming the community as members of Christ's body and members of one another. It is hardly surprising to find at this point, then, the deacon bringing the body and blood of the Lord to absent members of the community, as well as a collection being taken up for the poor and needy. Communion and caring: such are the first fruits of the sacrifice of the cross. He who said: "This is my body, given up for you" demands of His disciples a like response to be done in memory of Him by those who gather around the altar: and He who also said "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me" demands of them a faith response which takes a practical, social form. Christ's action at the Last Supper-taking, giving thanks, breaking and giving-continues to be actualized in the midst of His Church not merely in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup, but also in our participation in and profound realization of the sacrifice of the cross as a concrete expression of the offering of ourselves as living sacrifices.(3)

What we find in St. Justin's description of this clear and simple Mass liturgy from the 2nd century are indications of the interior life of Christians of that time, and we discover here also how it determined their very life-styles.

The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolitus

In the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolitus, which dates back to the year 215, we find another early document important to the study of the development of the Eucharistic Liturgy. It, too, contains the same simple Mass Liturgy described by St. Justin, and it is one of the earliest manuscripts recording a complete Eucharistic prayer. It is noted for the emphasis it gives to one of the primary effects of the sacrament of the Eucharist; namely, how our communion in Christ allows us to become one, unified sacri-

fice of praise.(4)

THE LITURGY AS COURT CEREMONY: (4th to the 8th Century)

With the Edict of Constantine in 313, the Church found itself at peace and, for the first time, part of the established society. This brought sudden and drastic changes to the traditionally simple liturgy of life. Church leaders were raised to the level of society's respectable elite, and bishops and priests began to play secular as well as religious roles. As early as 318, we find examples where bishops were called upon to act as judges in settling legal affairs not only among believers but between believers and non-believers as well. As such, they were given the position and title of Lords; and consequently, official court ceremony soon found its way into Church liturgy. Incense and candles, traditional symbols of kingly honour, previously accorded to representatives of the pagan deity, were now adopted in solemn liturgies as signs of the special veneration due to bishops and priests by virtue of their office. Deacons would now approach bishops on bended knee, kissing their foot in imitation of people of a lower rank expressing fealty to secular lords and princes. The liturgy soon became immersed in the pomp and ceremony of courtly life. (Another significant change came during the reign of Pope Damasus (366-384) when the Latin Language replaced the Greek in the liturgy of the Roman rite, since Latin was gradually becoming the lingua franca of the West.)

The triumph of court liturgy during the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries is attested to by the Ordo Romanus Primus. The Ordo describes in detail how Easter Sunday was celebrated at this time in the city of Rome. The Pope, accompanied by deacons and lords, would go in procession from the Church of the Lateran to St. Mary Major to offer Mass. The people would line his route along the way, presenting their petitions (often representing purely legal matters pending in the local courts).

Upon his arrival, the Pope would go to the sacristy to vest for Mass. He would then be led in procession into the church by acolytes bearing incense and candles. As he entered the church, the choir sang an entrance song, which was followed immediately by the singing of the Kyrie

and the Gloria. How the Kyrie, the last vestige of Greek in the Roman liturgy, got into the Mass, and in its present position as part of the entrance rites, illustrates the haphazard and arbitrary nature of changes in the liturgy during this period. It was Pope Gelasius (492-496) who set out to shorten the prayer of the faithful by replacing it with a short litany from the Eastern rite. The Kyrie was the people's response to the petitions. By the time of Gregory the Great (590-604), under the influence of court liturgy, the Mass had become even more interwoven with elaborate and lengthy ceremony. To save time, the petitions were shortened and chanted as part of the entrance rite for solemn Masses and abolished entirely at daily Mass. Eventually, all that was left of the prayer of the faithful were the original Greek responses: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.

The Ordo Romanus Primus also gives evidence of marked changes in the Liturgy of the Word. Justin's Apologia (150 AD) records the reading of the "memoirs of the Apostles and the writings of the Prophets", but the Ordo mentions the reading of only one lesson, which was to be followed by a reading from the Gospels. The rubrics further state that, after first having kissed the foot of the Bishop, the deacon should read the Gospel text while flanked by two candles and incense. After the Gospel, the Mass continued with the preparation of the gifts; there is no mention at all of either the homily or the prayer of the faithful.

In contrast to the brevity of the Liturgy of the Word, the Offertory was an elaborate affair, which was carried out with great ceremony. The Pope and his deacons went freely among the people to collect their offerings and bring them back to the altar. The Liturgy of the Eucharist followed the Offertory, after which the Lord's prayer was sung. Then the sancta (the leftover species from the previous Mass) was brought to the altar and placed into the chalice, and the kiss of peace was given in a descending order of rank beginning with the clergy. Communion was given under both species, and while the clergy broke the bread and shared the wine, the Agnus Dei was sung. (The Agnus Dei was introduced into the Mass by Pope Sergius (687-701), who had taken it from the Syrian rite.) Loaves

of leavened bread were in use at this time, and a number of priests were called upon to assist in breaking it into fragments in linen bags for distribution to the faithful. During this time, the names of those who would take breakfast with the Pope after Mass were called. After Communion, the Mass liturgy was brought to a close by the Post Communion prayer and the formal dismissal of the congregation. The Pope would again be led by acolytes bearing candles through the church and back to the sacristy. It was his custom to bless the people as he went along in procession.

The Ordo Romanus Primus gives us a striking illustration of the extent to which the liturgy of the Church was influenced by court ritual and how inundated it had become with courtly pomp and ceremony. The great display of court ceremonial completely overshadowed the Liturgy of the Word,



reducing the number of readings and obliterating the homily and the prayer of the faithful. Relationships within the worshipping community became more distant and estranged, and this was to have dire consequences on the liturgy in the centuries following.

THE MIDDLE AGES: CONFUSION AND CHAOS

The Germanic peoples, being non-latins, had no comprehension of Roman ritual and even less understanding of the meaning of its gestures and prayers. A popular solution to this problem was to have recourse to all kinds of symbolic interpretations in order to explain what was going on at Mass, i.e. the washing of the priest's hands recalled Pilate's

gesture after condemning Jesus; ascending the altar platform was to be taken as Jesus ascending Mount Calvary, the place of his sacrifice, etc. This approach to explaining the liturgy only served to complicate matters, further adding a note of mystery to misunderstanding. (This should serve as an object lesson for those today who tend to be overly fond of the use of elaborated court ceremony in liturgy.)

The times were also marked by a sharp sense of personal guilt. At Mass, celebrants began to insert their own prayers of contrition, later including additional prayers for the congregation and even prayers of atonement for the sins of the deceased. Psalm 42 made its appearance, and was recited at the foot of the altar as part of the entrance rite. Later, the Confiteor was said in addition to the psalm. Celebrants also composed their own personal prayers during the Offertory. The irony of all this was that as the personal prayers of the celebrant increased, the participation of the congregation decreased. As time passed, more and more understood less and less about the Latin liturgy, and it was not long before the celebrant and his assistants gave up the practice of going among the faithful to collect the Offertory gifts. Unleavened wafers gradually replaced the loaves of bread (completely in the West since 12th century), and these were prepared beforehand by acolytes, who were also called upon to make all the prayer responses since few people could understand Latin. In the end, everything connected with the Mass was placed in the hands of the clergy and their assistants, and this only served to increase the spread of ignorance and misunderstandings among the people. An aura of mysterious magic descended upon the Mass, intensified by the celebrant's new custom of praying with his back to the congregation in a barely audible voice. When altars were placed against the back wall and surrounded by a sanctuary area which the laity were forbidden to enter, the breakdown of traditional community liturgy was complete. This highly complicated Germanic form of the Mass found its way back to Rome in the 10th century. By then, however, this greatly disfigured version of the original hardened into habit and became fixed by custom and no remedy at that time was possible.

The above-mentioned manner of celebrating the Mass continued to create problems. The legacy of misleading

and erroneous interpretations found their way into instructions on the Mass to the people, which in turn encouraged all sorts of bizarre theories about the meaning of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The 'popular' interpretation of the Mass led to the custom of buying and selling the Mass, along with its attached indulgences, and this, in turn, led to liturgical chaos. Fear of receiving Holy Communion grew up among the people because of exaggerated feelings of guilt and unworthiness. Things came to such a pass that the Church had to impose, in 1215, as one of its four precepts, the yearly reception of Confession and Holy Communion as a minimum obligation upon all Catholics. It well might be said that this period represented the nadir of liturgical ignorance for the Church, and it was to last up until the reforms of the Council of Trent in the latter part of the 16th century.

THE CANONICAL LITURGY OF THE POST-REFORMATION

The council of Trent set out to put an end to further confusion and to "reform" the liturgy, "primarily by arresting the growth and proliferation of rites and rituals." The bishops, meeting in council, delegated this task to the Pope. In 1570, Pius V brought out the Missale Romanum, mandating its use throughout the universal Church in all those places that could not trace their liturgical tradition back 200 years. The Missale meant to abolish all forms of abuse that had accumulated around the liturgy during the previous two centuries. (The first Chinese Missal of 1670 was a translation of this work.) It laid down strict rules and a uniform set of rubrics and prayers, which no one had the authority to change or modify. In reality, this missal was merely a copy of the missal of the 13th century, and it included many elements from the Frankish - Germanic rituals of the 9th and 10th centuries, which we discussed earlier.(6)

While the Missale Romanum did succeed in unifying the liturgy throughout the Western Church, it was also instrumental in causing the liturgy to dry up and ossify. When the celebrant followed to the letter all the rubrics of the Mass, carefully reciting all its prayers, the Mass was then said to have been offered validly. The ordinary public, who could understand neither the Latin prayers nor the

accompanying rites, were reduced to the role of passive observers - those who "heard the Mass". This has been described by some as the golden age of the three isms: rubricism, canonicalism, and clericalism.

Given such a rigid and inflexible situation, there grew up alongside of the liturgy, and complementing it, many personal devotional prayers and para-liturgies. These were all in the vernacular, and were designed as outlets for people to express their religious sensibilities. As for the Mass itself, with generous display of flowers and candles to set the scene and beautiful polyphonic music, it became a solemn liturgical musical drama.

VATICAN II: RETURN TO THE ORIGINAL SOURCES

By the twentieth century, the Gospel had spread well beyond Europe into every culture and nation of the world. The Missale Romanum, with its Latin language and highly clerical style, was obviously an inadequate instrument to meet the liturgical needs of so many diverse kinds of people. By the end of the 19th century, liturgical movements had already sprung up throughout Europe and beyond. The climax of these movements was the Second Vatican Council's decree on the liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium. The decree proclaimed:

It is the liturgy through which, especially in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, "the work of our redemption is accomplished," and it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church...

(7)

The decree states that Christ is present in Word and Sacrament, in the priestly service, and the people of God gathered in communal prayer, in order to actualize His continual work of redemption. It gives as the reason for the Church's reform of the liturgy the desire and need to assist the faithful in participating actively and consciously in the Eucharistic sacrifice and, thereby, to receive its fruits in greater abundance. The decree states that the liturgy is first and foremost a community action involving both

the clergy and the faithful, each having distinct roles commensurate with their competency and office. Both are to perform those parts that pertain to their office in accordance with the nature of each individual rite and general liturgical principles. In laying down general norms, the decree asserts the primacy of sacred scripture as central to the celebration of the liturgy, for it is scripture that gives the liturgy its structure and it is scripture that is the source of its prayers and signs. Further norms follow:

1. The rites should be distinguished by simplicity: they should be short, concise, clear and unencumbered by useless repetition, and well within the reach of the people's powers of comprehension.

2. The use of the vernacular is of great advantage to the people in the celebration of Mass, particularly in the preaching of the Word.

3. Each local church may take steps to adapt the liturgy to its local situation and the needs of its people.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, when treating of the reform of the Mass, clarified further that the Mass is not only the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but it is also Christ's sacred banquet, and the faithful are present at this banquet not as silent spectators but as active participants. Together with the priest they are to give thanks to God, and through his hands offer themselves with him in union with the unspotted Victim. All that impedes or is out of harmony with the expression of the inner nature of the liturgy, all the unnecessary encumbrances that have accumulated throughout the centuries, are to be removed. In accordance with the needs of the times, the sound traditions of the Fathers are to be retained. There should also be more use of the sacred scriptures, and both the homily and the prayer of the faithful are to be restored.(8) Thus, in 1970, after 400 long years, the Missale of Pius V gave way to the new Missal of Vatican II.

The Missal of 1970 is similar in its simple style to the one recorded by St. Justin in his Apologia of 150 AD. Along with the traditional Roman Canon, there is a second Eucharistic prayer, which is an edited version of the one found in St. Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition. The Missal also provides a third and fourth form of the

Eucharistic prayer, both of which were composed specifically for the 1970 edition. As for the Lectionary, there is a more abundant use of scriptural texts than previously. Sunday readings are now divided into a three-year cycle, with a reading from the Old Testament, the Epistles, and the Gospels for each Sunday. Daily readings follow a two-year cycle, with the first reading alternating between the New and the Old Testaments. This system allows for about 90% of the Bible to be proclaimed at Mass over each three year period. Naturally, the homily and the prayer of the faithful have been restored to their proper place in the Liturgy of the Word. The Missal of 1970 has been translated into many local languages throughout the world, and it has also been adapted to fit local situations and needs. The new Missal has done away with the encumbrances that had begun to creep into the liturgy when the Latin rite was extended to include non-Latin peoples during the 9th century, and the vernacular versions have gone a long way to adapt local conditions into liturgy.

What has also all but disappeared is the rigid inflexibility that marked the liturgy since the Post-Reformation period. The theoretical base for liturgy today is the simple, clear, and direct manifestation of the Word of God and the vital action of the sacrament in our midst. In practice, however, only time can tell in what manner theory will be realized in the concrete practice of each local church. A great deal will depend on how the spirit of the liturgy is nurtured in each worshipping community.

CONCLUSION

The Missal of 1970 has been in use now for 16 years, yet the Diocese of Hong Kong is still in the process of re-editing its Chinese translation. The translation of texts always poses a certain amount of problems, especially when it comes to the translation of prayers. There is something about the nature of prayer that does not easily lend itself to transposition from one culture to another. Prayers borrowed from another culture do not often grow well in foreign soil. And while there is no question about the need to translate the scriptures from original sources, when it comes to liturgical prayers, they should be composed

locally to fit local liturgical and cultural conditions. We in Hong Kong could do well to follow the example of the Italian church which has recently published a fifth Eucharistic prayer as well as a set of new collects for Sunday Masses, all of which are of local composition.

As members of the Chinese church, we must also learn from the mistakes of history. This is especially true when it comes to ritual and ceremony. We must guard against a rigid and inflexible approach to our liturgy. Along with a respect for our traditions, we must open ourselves to the present realities of our own particular situation, and accept the life and vitality of the Word and Sacrament as it continues to express itself in our midst. Let the Word of God, then, be rooted in Chinese culture and in the contemporary expression of Chinese life in order that we might come soon to the achievement of a Mass liturgy which is alive and expressive of both our Chinese culture and our communion with the universal Church. For this, we work and pray.

(FOOTNOTES SEE THIS ISSUE p. 8)

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