

LITURGY AND THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

I am an aspiring liturgy teacher - by which I mean that, with two members now in the novitiate, the novice mistress has asked me to introduce them to the study of liturgy. I haven't done any serious teaching for many years, and I have never taught liturgy, so it could legitimately be asked whether I am the right person for the job. I have studied liturgy though, to some extent, even before entering, mediated of course through *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Since then, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has been promulgated. With the prospect of novitiate classes before me I must therefore ask myself two questions:

1. How should my understanding of liturgy have changed or developed as a result of the *Catechism*? And
2. How should this affect my teaching of liturgy?

With the Stanbrook novice mistress here today I had better get the answer right, or I may find myself with more time on my hands than I had anticipated.

I see two further questions, as supplementary to the above:

1. What is the place of liturgy in the structure of the *Catechism* as a whole?
2. On the subject of liturgy, what is the relationship between the *Catechism* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*? As time is short, I shall focus on just two areas – the Trinity, and in particular the Holy Spirit, and active participation.

Liturgy in the structure of the Catechism

Catechisms have generally followed a traditional, fourfold structure: creed, sacraments, commandments and prayer, based on the catechumenate programme of the early church. The candidate for baptism had to learn and profess the faith, recite the Our Father, adopt the Christian way of living based on the Lord's commandment of love, and finally, to enter into the peculiarly Christian form of worship. Expressed dynamically, it could be said that these "pillars", as the *Catechism* now calls them¹, proclaim what the Church is, what she celebrates, how she lives and how she prays; in other words, all that goes to make up Christian living. The *Catechism* says it aims at an "organic synthesis," based on the principal sources of Scripture, the Fathers, liturgy and the magisterium, all in the light of the Second Vatican Council and tradition as a whole.² Liturgy then is both source and content of the Christian life. This is not new - *Sacrosanctum Concilium* memorably spoke of liturgy as the source and summit (*fons et culmen*) of the Christian life - but the pairing, even here, alludes to the *lex orandi, lex credendi* interplay which lies behind so much liturgical and theological development.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 13

² CCC 11

Useful as these observations are, however, they are only the first steps towards a deeper appreciation we would want and expect from a document of this kind. The Pope, in the apostolic constitution *Fidei Depositum* which introduces the *Catechism*, takes us further: we are in the realm of Christian *mystery* - that word so rich with the resonance of Paul's use of it in the letter to Ephesians (mystery as God's saving purpose, his plan)¹, and taken up and developed by Odo Casel and others during the liturgically critical years of the 20th century, prior to the Council. We are told by the Pope that in the *Catechism* "we can perceive the wonderful unity of the mystery of God, his saving will."² The *Catechism* itself opens: "God...in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man"³ The aim is *catechesis*, presented here as a **totality of efforts** to make disciples and help men believe.⁴ Liturgy is central to this "totality of efforts". In a way, in a life such as ours, this hardly needs stating, but for those (novices) in the early stages of a life so immersed in liturgy, it may help to have this recognized and articulated, a sort of 'putting in context' at the rational level. I see this as one purpose of studying liturgy and, in particular, it will be the aim of early lessons on Paul's use of the word *mysterion*: we are aiming at this stage for an overview, or rather a whole-view, not so succinct, or condensed, as that presented in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, but one which will found not just further (cognitive) study of liturgy, but a life centred around and lived from liturgy throughout the whole of monastic life.

Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Catechism

SC and the *Catechism* are two entirely different types of document. One, the *Catechism*, is systematic and coherent, the parts independent yet, as we have just seen, interrelated and integral within the whole. As we know from its history, it had a long evolution prior to direct work on the document itself, and even this stage took six years to execute.⁵ SC, on the other hand, came about in a much more untidy fashion. The bishops arriving at Council, despite their desire to renew the liturgy, were expecting to work on a purely practical document dealing with rites and rubrics, vestments even, and of course the use of Latin. To a large extent the finished article is practical, as an examination of section headings in particular will show. The frequent use of words such as 'promotion', 'norms', may arouse interest in some but, out of context, they hardly inspire. However, the practical thrust of the document remains critical: the exhortation to *active participation*, as the principal objective of this practical orientation, and the premise on which it was based, changed the whole experience of liturgy and, despite some justifiable criticisms, we wouldn't want it otherwise.

It was Chapter One however, which, throughout the course of the sessions, evolved into not just the most important part of the *Constitution*, but of determining importance for the Council as a whole. I was interested to discover, for instance, that when the schema for *Lumen Gentium* came to be discussed, it was summarily dismissed because "it did not correspond to the spirit and content of the ecclesiology already approved in the *Constitution on the Liturgy*."⁶ This chapter, which presents a theology of liturgy, was actually an afterthought; no

¹ Eph 3: 4-6

² *Fidei Depositum* (FD) 2

³ CCC 1

⁴ cf CCC 4

⁵ FD 1 and as any introduction to CCC outlines.

⁶ G. Diekmann "The Constitution on the Liturgy in Retrospect" *Worship* 40 (1966) 410-11, referring to

such section was originally intended; subcommission *thirteen* (no less!) was set up to work on it⁷. I wonder if it is to the history of this section of the liturgy document that we must look for the ancestry of the some of the significant developments which later came in the *Catechism*. The unsystematic way it came about, with the probable lack of planning about structure and content, particularly theological content, may account for some of its weaknesses.

The Holy Spirit and the Trinity

Even during the Council it was noted by Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant observers that there was insufficient emphasis on the Holy Spirit and his role in the life of the Church. Congar tells us that although there are 258 references to the Spirit in the documents, many with elements of true pneumatology, some only “‘give a sprinkling of the Holy Spirit’ to a text that is basically not pneumatological”.⁸ The liturgy document in particular betrays this weakness. This was recognized even at the time and three specific mentions were introduced, but, adds Diekmann, “the role of the Spirit is still not sufficiently stressed or integrated into the total theological presentation.”⁹ The orientation of this document, as indeed of the Council as a whole, is Christocentric and ecclesiocentric.

*The liturgy is the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, **the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.***
(SC 2)

*Every liturgical celebration, because it is **an action of Christ the priest and of His Body the Church,** is a sacred action surpassing all others.* (SC 7)

Examples could be multiplied. The one apposite reference in Chapter 1 presents the Spirit simply as one who confirms the mission of the apostles, sent by Christ, who was himself sent by the Father (SC 6). The theme of the divine missions hinted at here will be taken up and developed 30 years later in the *Catechism* (CCC 689 - 690, 1066).

Trinity as the foundation of liturgy in the *Catechism*

Where the Spirit is lacking (so to speak) in the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, the *Catechism* more than makes up for it. A profound meditation on the work of each Person of the Trinity opens the section on liturgy and the sacraments (1077 - 1112). Not only is the work of the Spirit in liturgy presented in some detail, but so also is that of the Father, in a way that more than redresses the seemingly unilateral focus on the Son in the Vatican II document. Liturgy is the work of the *Trinity* and involves each Person in a unique way: the Father is the source and goal; the work of the Son is the Paschal Mystery. Finally, the Spirit: he (there is no suggestion in the *Catechism* that the Spirit is a ‘she’!) is the teacher of faith, the “artisan of God’s masterpieces”, with four specific functions, in or through, liturgy: to prepare humankind for the reception of Christ, to recall the mystery of Christ, to make the mystery of Christ present, and to bring us into communion with Christ and so form his Body the Church. Catherine Mowry La Cugna highlights how it “is a notorious problem in dogmatic theology and in catechisms” where to place the section which deals with the Trinity and how to treat the

interventions by Cardinal Suenens and Archbishop Martin of Rouen.

⁷ Bugnini, A. *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948 - 1975*, trans. M.J. O’Connell, p.7

⁸ Congar *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* Vol 1 p. 167. Congar does not subscribe to this view himself, but he did feel it sufficiently worthy of note to quote it, although without naming its author.

⁹ Diekmann, op. cit. p.422. I have not yet identified the specific additions.

subject: is it better to deal with God as he is in himself (ontology, theology) or as he reveals himself, particularly through the work of redemption (economy, soteriology)?¹⁰ This catechism is clear on the point: “the whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men ‘and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin’” (234). “By the divine missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, God the Father fulfils the ‘plan of his loving goodness’ of creation, redemption and sanctification”. (235). We are only at the beginning of the section on the creed, but even here liturgy is the starting-point: notice how it is the baptismal formula and context which introduces the Trinity; faith rests on the response to a three-part question posed in a liturgical setting.¹¹

Active Participation

This is seminal in SC, occurring at least 25 times. Given the expressed desire for continuity with the Council¹², it is presumably no less important in the *Catechism*, but apart from relatively few direct references to Council documents, this is not immediately apparent. One senses that in the light of all that has happened since Vatican II, the *Catechism* is aiming for a fine balance. The theme is there, but muted; oblique, yet effective. The bishops, for whom the *Catechism* is primarily intended, wanted a text to serve as “a point of reference”(12). This would suggest something which both guides and enables, while it also curbs the extreme and misguided. Chapter 2 (of the liturgy section) concentrates on celebration. In discussing *who* celebrates liturgy, and *how* it is celebrated, is this the *Catechism*'s way of tackling some of the thorny issues raised by active participation, in particular ministry and forms of celebration? Liturgy is the action of the *whole* Christ - the Body in heaven and the *whole* community on earth, sharing in the common priesthood of Christ, in which all members participate (1142) according to their proper function (1144). This is largely drawn from SC 27 - 29; the new element comes with the introduction of *leitourgos*, first used earlier of Christ himself: “the Church is servant in the image of her Lord, the one *leitourgos*”(1070, 1144). The focus is on Christ's priesthood and on the fact that we all share in it in different ways, rather than on hierarchy.

Appropriate forms of active participation are guided by right use of signs and symbols, which offer, we are told, a “divine pedagogy of salvation”. There are levels of assessment against which to validate good liturgical signs and symbols: creation and human culture, taken up by the Old Covenant and fulfilled in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the sacraments. All the richness of signs and symbols of the cosmos and social life are not abolished in the sacraments of a the Church but “purified and integrated” (1152). There is to be a “harmony of the signs of celebration” which applies also to song, music, words and actions (1158, 1162). Perhaps the critical level for sifting what is true and good for use in liturgy is the first, the cosmos and the human world. Drawing on the Wisdom tradition, man is expected to use his intelligence to perceive genuine spiritual realities through the physical, to find traces of his Creator and relate to him (1146, 1147). The Wisdom theme is taken up later, and for a complementary purpose, in the section on the Commandments. The eighth commandment, on truth, includes a section

¹⁰ La Cugna “The Doctrine of the Trinity” in *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p 70

¹¹ It is perhaps worth drawing attention to the fact that Part One of the *Catechism* uses the Apostles' Creed for its basic structure, rather than the Nicene version: the creed, direct in style and content, which is addressed personally to candidates for baptism for their assent, rather than the dense, ‘philosophical’ creed of the Council, the “creed for bishops”. c.f. Ratzinger & Schonborn *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp 31-32

¹² *Fidei Depositum*, Title page and Introduction

on *Truth, Beauty and Sacred Art*. The book of Wisdom is quoted at some length (chapters 7 & 8) and in the light of this, of Wisdom as the breath of the power of God and pure emanation of his glory, man's ability to create through art, after the manner of his Creator, is affirmed. This is especially true of sacred art (of which signs, symbols and music are part), provided it is both true and beautiful, and evokes and glorifies the transcendent mystery of God (2502).

The theme of active participation is, therefore, present in the CCC, but not laboured. There are stringent criteria to be followed but, despite more or less continuous controversy since the Council over what are genuine and appropriate forms of active participation, these are largely expressed in positive, not negative, terms.

Conclusion

A 20 minute talk cannot accomplish very much, beyond raising questions or opening doors of further enquiry. In preparing to teach I have had to bring myself up-to-date with recent sources. Liturgy in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is rich indeed; a source not just of study, but of prayer and *lectio*. I think especially of sections on the Father, as the source of all blessing (1077 - 1083), on the Trinity (257 - 260), and on the Holy Spirit (694 - 701, 1091 - 1112). Thank God for classes to the novitiate. Without the spur of these, I might have taken far longer to turn to the *Catechism*, and I believe I have encountered only the tip of the iceberg.

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