

# Where is Catholic liturgy going?

*John Baldwin*

**I**N THE COURSE OF THE PAST THIRTY-FIVE YEARS since the end of the Second Vatican Council unparalleled change has taken place in Roman Catholic worship. Even though the liturgical reforms seem to have reached an impasse in the recent past, it is important to review the very important gains that they have brought to the lives of the Catholic faithful. At the same time, while assessing the current situation, it is also important to name areas where the liturgy seems to have stalled or needs significant improvement. In the interests of seeking a way out of the current liturgy wars,<sup>1</sup> this essay will be an attempt to find a way both to commend what has happened and to recommend a way towards the future. As Kevin Irwin puts it, reform is but a step on the way to renewal. The real purpose of liturgy is not to point attention to itself but rather to God and God's presence and activity in our lives as individuals and as communities.

Currently one senses that for all the changes of the past generation, in many places very little has changed profoundly and the heady optimism that characterized so much of Roman Catholic life in the late sixties and seventies may have been unwarranted.

## *Commendation*

Some thirty-five years after the Council, it would be a great mistake to think that nothing important has been accomplished. One has only to read J. D. Crichton's memoir of what some think of as the 'good old days', or Bernard Botte's reflections on life before the liturgical movement, to realize that the world of Roman Catholic worship has changed a great deal – especially since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Gone are the days, for example, when there was virtually no recognizable connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and the reception of Holy Communion.

Significant improvement in every area of Catholic liturgy has resulted from the reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council. There are at least nine areas in which the reform of the past thirty-five years has been successful.

### *Scripture*

The Liturgy Constitution mandated a renewed appreciation of the Bible in Roman Catholic liturgy (24). It also directed that the 'treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that a richer share in God's word may be provided for the faithful' (51). The tangible result was a lectionary which has now become an important force shaping Catholic faith. The three-year cycle of readings enables Catholics to appreciate each of the Synoptic Gospels in its integrity and the Gospel of John during the seasons of Lent and Easter.<sup>3</sup> For the first time since the patristic era the Old Testament is proclaimed at the Eucharist on a regular basis.

As is well known, the Roman Catholic Lectionary has served as the basis for liturgical renewal in Protestant and Anglican churches as well. First with the Common Lectionary and now with the Revised Common Lectionary, the vast majority of the world's Christians read at least the same Gospel and New Testament reading each week.

Needless to say the expanded lectionary is not sufficient to produce biblical literacy among Catholics. It is, however, a great inspiration for believers to deepen their knowledge, appreciation and critical understanding of the treasures of Sacred Scripture.

### *Language*

Together with the expanded lectionary, the permission to use languages other than Latin in the Roman Rite has been the major accomplishment of the Liturgy Constitution and the post-conciliar reform. It is true that the Constitution preserved Latin as the language of the Latin rites (36:1). At the same time, it opened up the possibility of translating parts of the liturgy into languages that people can understand (36:2). It was only after the Council that it became clear that the entirety of the liturgical corpus of the Church needed to be translated.<sup>4</sup> Even during the Council itself it became clear that the good of the English-speaking Church would be well served by the creation of an international commission devoted to liturgical translation. Thus was born the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), a creation of eleven national Episcopal conferences<sup>5</sup> which has translated all of the liturgical books once and is in the midst of a second generation of translations. Up to the present, liturgical translation has been done on the basis of the instruction on translation (entitled *Comme le prévoit*) issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1969. Currently the Congregation seems to have distanced itself from *Comme le prévoit's* preference for

‘dynamic equivalence’ (a certain priority given to the host language of the translation) to a more rigid and literal translation of both vocabulary and syntax – but more of this below. In any case, the use of language that can engage the faithful has been an enormous boon to liturgical participation.

*Full, conscious and active participation*

The third beneficial result of the conciliar mandate has been the increase in full, conscious and active participation. The Constitution made it clear that such participation was not a concession, granted as it were from above, but rather the baptismal birthright of Christians (14). Even though there can be and indeed is a good deal of disagreement over precisely what full, conscious and active participation consists of, all can agree upon it as a goal of ongoing liturgical renewal.

*The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

One of the lessons of modern ecclesiology is that liturgy cannot be severed from understanding the nature and activity of the Church. In fact, much of what is conceived of as problematic in contemporary Roman Catholic liturgy is really more a matter of ecclesiology than liturgy strictly speaking. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is a good example of how liturgy and ecclesiology come together. The RCIA is not so much a series of rituals as it is a handbook for a renewed ecclesiology – a new way of being the Church that depends on faith-filled persons responding to God’s gracious initiative by taking their place in the Body of Christ. One regularly hears that the RCIA is not just ‘another renewal program’ but rather is itself church renewal.<sup>6</sup> The reason for this is that the RCIA requires the active participation of a number of ministries in the Church, a renewed appreciation of the annual liturgical cycle, and a rather holistic understanding of Christian faith.

*The liturgical year*

Another major achievement has been a renewed understanding and appreciation of the annual liturgical cycle. The liturgical calendar was considerably simplified especially in order to let Sunday stand out as the principle celebration of the Paschal Mystery, ‘the first holy day of all’ (106).<sup>7</sup> Second, the seasons have been arranged more clearly to correspond both to their original shape and to modern needs. For example, the two-fold aspect of Lent as initiatory as well as penitential now stands out and Advent is understood more as a season of preparation than penance (109). Third, the calendar of the saints’ days

has been considerably re-arranged and streamlined so that only saints of universal significance remain on the universal calendar (111).

### *The Liturgy of the Hours*

It may seem like wishful thinking to include the Liturgy of the Hours among the successful aspects of the past thirty-five years of change. My point, however, is not that any single aspect of the reform has been an unalloyed success but rather that it is very important to recognize the extent of beneficial change even as limitations and challenges are discussed. In this light, the re-arranged daily prayer of the Church is a great improvement. It connects the major liturgical hours (morning and evening) to the appropriate times of the day (88-89, 94) and spreads the Psalter (including now a significant number of New Testament canticles) out over four weeks (91). The reformed Liturgy of the Hours also updates the non-scriptural readings, even including material from modern popes and the Second Vatican Council.

### *Anointing of the sick*

Another advance in pastoral practice as well as liturgical celebration has been a renewed understanding of the anointing of the sick. Returning to the practice of the early Church, the Liturgy Constitution mandated a revision of 'Extreme Unction' (the last sacrament) so that this anointing might be employed for the seriously ill (73-75). The result has been that the pastoral care of the sick and aged has now been enriched by the sacramental rites of the Church. *Viaticum*, or the last holy communion, is now (appropriately) the final sacramental ritual as the Christian's food for the journey.

### *Penance*

The Liturgy Constitution expressed its mandate for a change in the celebration of Penance rather laconically: 'The rite and formularies for the sacrament of Penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and the effect of the sacrament' (72). The ritual which resulted in 1973, however, has signified a major recovery of the communal nature of penance, not to mention the importance of Scripture for every liturgical celebration – even individual penance. As communal penance services become more common, the communal nature of both sin and reconciliation become more apparent to Roman Catholics.

### *Centrality of the Eucharist*

One of the major accomplishments of the reform, little noticed today because it has become such a normal aspect of church life, is the

renewed appreciation of the Eucharist as the centre of the Church's life. It is not for nothing that the saying 'the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church' has been revived. More and more there is a growing appreciation of the fact that the Eucharist is not only the consecrated gifts received in holy communion but also the activity which makes the Church what it is: the Body of Christ.<sup>8</sup> This has meant a certain diminishment of popular devotions, a perhaps over-reliance on celebrating the Eucharist when other forms of liturgy (e.g. Liturgy of the Hours) might be more appropriate to a particular situation, but in general it has signalled a renewed Christian spirit.

### ***Contestation***

I recently showed a video based on Cardinal Roger Mahony's excellent 1997 pastoral letter, *Gather faithfully together: guide for Sunday mass*, at a diocesan liturgical conference. I asked the participants to begin their reflections with what they saw in the video that was already the practice in their assemblies for worship. Their reactions were very encouraging. A great deal, some of it sketched out above, has been accomplished in thirty-five years. On the other hand it is clear that the reform of the liturgy is very much contested.

Francis Mannion has outlined a typology for understanding the spectrum of attitudes toward liturgical reform in the United States.<sup>9</sup> I believe that his 'types' are also a useful tool outside the American context. Mannion discerns five different liturgical movements at present:

#### *Advancing official reform*

This movement is characterized by ICEL and the various bishops' conferences and their committees on liturgy. It looks to a second generation of substantial revision of the liturgical texts and rituals.

#### *Restoring the preconciliar*

Since the beginning of the reform there have been a number of Catholics who have judged it ill-advised and pressed for a return to preconciliar liturgy, arguing that the current reform smacks of Protestantism. John Paul II has responded to this discontent (and the schism caused by Archbishop Lefebvre's ordaining bishops) by the creation of the commission *Ecclesia Dei* and the permission for diocesan bishops to allow the so-called Tridentine Mass in their dioceses.

*Reforming the reform*

A somewhat less draconian position is taken by those who recognize that the pre-conciliar liturgy needed reform, but judge that what resulted from the post-conciliar commissions (not necessarily the liturgy constitution) was too drastic. The names of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Father Joseph Fessio and Msgr. Klaus Gamber have been associated with this movement.<sup>10</sup> Among other items on its agenda this group would desire the return to having the priest and people face in the same direction for prayer as well as a single eucharistic prayer for the Roman Rite.

*Inculturating the reform*

According to Mannion, this group holds that only the first phase of the liturgical reform (the translation of the books) has been completed. An entirely new phase which consists of inculturating what is in the books needs to take place. He associates this movement with the North American Academy of Liturgy as well as the well-known Filipino Benedictine liturgical scholar, Anscar Chupungco. The agenda is legitimized by paragraphs 37-40 of the Constitution on the Liturgy which encourage (and set limits for) cultural adaptation.<sup>11</sup>

*Recatholicizing the reform*

Most framers of typologies (e.g., H. Richard Niebuhr, George Lindbeck) place the type that they favour last. Mannion is no exception. For him what is most needed today is not so much reform of the current liturgy as a deepening of its spirituality and 'pastoral appropriation'. Thus Mannion is rather cautious about liturgical change. His 'heroes' in this reform are Henri de Lubac, Romano Guardini, and (especially) Hans Urs von Balthasar. A new American academic association, the Society for Catholic Liturgy, as well as a journal, *Antiphon*, represent the agenda of recatholicizing.

I find this map of the current liturgical terrain both accurate and useful. I can agree with Mannion that much needs to be done in terms of the spiritual grounding of liturgy reform. All too often it appears that reformed rituals have been adopted with very little sense of their theological meaning and their connection to the deeper Catholic tradition. On the other hand, I suppose I would end up closer to the first and fourth agendas ('official' and 'inculturating') when it comes to making specific decisions about liturgical reform. There remain a number of contested issues in the liturgy today. I will outline four of these issues briefly.

*Inculturation*

Inculturation refers to the process and result of the encounter between the Christian Gospel and a culture. The word may be new but the phenomenon is as old as Christianity itself. The nature of inculturation is an umbrella for the particular issues that follow. The question is this: to what extent is the cultural world into which Christianity was born and the Sacred Scriptures were written normative for other cultures? The socio-historical study of early Christianity that has been undertaken during the past hundred years reveals how deeply the Christian movement was shaped by the culture(s) of the eastern Mediterranean. In what sense are the culture-bound elements found in the New Testament determinative for later Christian practice? And – more to the point today – for Roman Catholics what does the European development of faith and practice imply for continuity with the tradition?<sup>12</sup> Where one stands on these questions will determine the shape of theology, spirituality and practice.

Let us take a specific example. Are wheat bread and grape wine absolutely necessary for the celebration of the Eucharist? Analysis of this issue is far from simple. It involves the nature of the Eucharist as a sacrificial meal, the extent to which a host culture may or may not need to be confronted by Christian faith and practice, and the nature of the unity desired for Catholic practice. A reasonable person could argue that an ordinary foodstuff and festive drink are the functional equivalents of the elements that have become universal in the Christian tradition of celebrating the Eucharist. An equally reasonable person could argue that continuity with Christian tradition demands that these elements be bread and wine. It seems to me that the route of dynamic or functional equivalence can be more faithful to the tradition than strict fidelity to the traditional elements. Each of the following issues is similar to this umbrella issue of inculturation.

*Language (again)*

Given the necessity for translation (itself a contested question), what strategies should be employed for liturgical texts? I mentioned above that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has moved in the direction of a stricter fidelity to the vocabulary and syntax of texts that are to be translated from the Latin. Certain groups, e.g. Credo, an association of priests in the United States, have criticized the ICEL texts because they do not conform to this strategy for translation.<sup>13</sup>

A number of issues are at stake: inclusive language for human beings, deprecative language and style of prayer, the use of imagery, and the aural nature of texts for proclamation. Keeping a balance on these issues is no easy task. A careful study of the French, German, Italian and Spanish translations of liturgical texts shows great variety and flexibility in rendering the original Latin prayers. The major question can be put with relative directness: how close should the translated text be to the vocabulary and syntax of the original in order to convey the meaning in oral proclamation? The presumption here is that the end result should be the communication of the meaning of the text in an oral fashion.

For example, a typical Latin collect will begin *Da, quaesumus, Domine . . .* A literal translation would render this as 'Grant, we beg you, O Lord . . .' One notes that the pleading (*Da* and *quaesumus*) is repeated. Some would find in this a key to prayer in the Roman Rite. Repeated pleading is a sign of our utter reliance on God, a kind of antidote to Pelagianism. On the other hand, knowledge of the syntax of Latin Prayer reveals that very often such duplication is important for understanding the rhythm or *cursus* of the text – in other words, its orality in Latin. An accurate translation would therefore not necessarily include the duplication of deprecative words.

### *Music*

Another deeply contested issue is that of liturgical music. Roman Catholics have had to invent a tradition of vernacular liturgical music practically out of whole cloth. The results have admittedly been mixed.<sup>14</sup> At issue is what kind of music will serve both the rites of the Church and the religious needs of believers. It seems to me that this is an arena in which a kind of Darwinian natural selection is inevitable. Useable music will stand the test of time. This does not always mean the survival of the best music – but rather music that serves both the rites and the spirituality of the people.<sup>15</sup>

Here at the very least one can recall the retort reportedly given by Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee when asked what one should do in order to become a liturgical musician: 'First become a musician.'<sup>16</sup>

### *Architecture*

Very few issues cause as much consternation in the contemporary Roman Catholic Church as liturgical architecture. If one were to ask the average Catholic about the most significant change in the liturgy after the Council, next to the adoption of the vernacular, my suspicion is that



the response would be: 'They turned the altar around.' This simple re-orientation of priest and people has caused a sea-change in Roman Catholic liturgical architecture. The issue is particularly contested when it comes to the renovation of existing churches, not constructed for a post-Vatican II liturgy. The litmus test has become the placement of the reserved sacrament: separate chapel, side altar, or a position directly behind the existing altar table? Official Catholic legislation has moved away from recommending the use of a separate Blessed Sacrament chapel to allowing the diocesan bishop to decide.<sup>17</sup>

In the construction of new churches, congregations, their pastors and their bishops must decide between some kind of arrangement of gathered seating around an altar and a longitudinal axis with pews or chairs all linked up and facing in the same direction. The spirit of the renewed liturgy clearly favours the former type of arrangement.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Recommendation***

Since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 a great deal has happened to Roman Catholic liturgy. Like the past thirty-five years of cultural change in general, this period of liturgical change is unparalleled in church history. Only some aspects of the Reformation of the sixteenth century (especially in the wake of the printing press) can rival the extent of the transformation of worship. Such a tremendous amount of change cannot take place without significant losses and gains, and although it seems like the bloom is off the rose of liturgical reform, it is necessary that we recognize the remarkable gains that the past thirty-five years have brought to Catholic liturgy. It is also important to be cognizant of the contested issues and how very much is at stake in the way they are played out.

Now – what might be a way to the future? Elsewhere I have suggested a template, which I entitle 'Core, Code, and Culture', as a way of sorting out issues of further liturgical reform.<sup>19</sup> Briefly, my argument is that all assessments of liturgical change need to take account of the code that various traditions (Lutheran, Byzantine, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic) have developed over time as well as the culture in which the code is being adapted. One cannot point to core essences of the rites, but one can postulate core structures and patterns of liturgies by extrapolating them from liturgical history.<sup>20</sup> In other words there is no such thing as an ideal liturgical form which we are trying to imitate. Every liturgy needs to embody Christian faith as it is filtered through its code and culture.

Allowing for such a procedure would make for great latitude in adapting liturgies while at the same time paying close attention to the historical, theological and anthropological data that both tradition and contemporary experience afford. Problems only become intractable when this or that tradition is so idolized that one cannot discern that the core patterns lie behind it and not in its specific contents.

Reference was made above to the notion that not only does the Church make Eucharist but also the Eucharist makes the Church. It may take several generations before this insight takes root in Catholic liturgical celebration. Classic preachers like Augustine of Hippo understood well that the Eucharist constituted the world as God wills it – a world where human beings know how to share the most important things with deep respect for one another and utter faith in God – in other words, a world transformed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is what Robert Hovda called the liturgy as ‘Kingdom play’.<sup>21</sup> In the Holy Spirit Christians act out the reign of God in their liturgical celebrations so that they become nothing other than the Christian life in a (ritual) nutshell. Liturgy only succeeds in glorifying God and making human beings holy when this connection with ordinary life is experienced as a reality.

If there is any signpost for the future of Roman Catholic liturgy, it is here. Future renewal will depend on how well pastors and teachers can celebrate and communicate the connection between liturgy and life.<sup>22</sup>

**John F. Baldwin SJ** is Professor of Historical and Liturgical Theology at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

#### NOTES

1 I am borrowing this notion from Kevin Irwin, ‘Getting past the liturgy wars: reform at the service of renewal’, *Church* (Fall, 2000), pp 5–10.

2 J. D. Crichton, *As it was: reminiscences and prophecies* (Mildenhall: Decani Books, 1999); Bernard Botte, *From silence to participation: an insider’s view of liturgical renewal*, translated by John Sullivan (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1988), pp 1–8.

3 John 6, the Bread of Life discourse, is inserted into the Ordinary Time Gospels of the Markan (B) cycle.

4 In this and every other area of liturgical reform, the book to read is Annibale Bugnini, *The reform of the liturgy 1948–1975*, translated by Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990).

5 Australia, Canada, England & Wales, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Scotland, South Africa and the United States. Similar ‘mixed commissions’ exist for German – the *Internationale Arbeits Gemeinschaft (IAG)* and French – *Commission Internationale Francophone pour la Traduction de la Liturgie (CIFTL)*.

6 For an excellent commentary on the rite as well as its theological implications, see Aidan Kavanagh, *The shape of baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1986).

7 Of particular value is the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II, *Dies Domini (On keeping the Lord's day holy, 1998)* in D. Lysik (ed), *The liturgy documents: a parish resource*, volume two (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), pp 1–49.

8 For a valuable essay on this notion of eucharistic ecclesiology, see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist makes the Church: Henri deLubac and John Zizioulas in dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). For Eucharist and initiation, see Nathan Mitchell, *Eucharist as sacrament of initiation* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994).

9 M. Francis Mannion, 'Agendas for liturgical reform', *America* 175:17 (November 30, 1996), pp 9–16.

10 See for example Joseph Ratzinger, *The spirit of the liturgy*, translated by John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000); Klaus Gamber, *The reform of the Roman liturgy: its problems and background*, translated by Klaus D. Grimm (San Juan Capistrano: Una Voce Press, 1993). Joseph Fessio initiated a newsletter of the movement, edited by Helen Hull Hitchcock and entitled *Adoremus*.

11 See also the so-called fourth instruction on the liturgy: 'Inculturation and the Roman liturgy' (1994) in *The liturgy documents*, volume two, pp 107–136.

12 See, for example, James Russell, *The Germanization of early medieval Christianity: a sociocultural approach to religious transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

13 For a survey of the question, see Gilbert Ostiedek, 'Principles of translation in the revised sacramentary', in M. Francis and K. Pecklers (eds), *Liturgy for the new millenium: a commentary on the revised sacramentary* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), p 17–34.

14 For an excellent essay on the documents related to liturgical music, especially in the United States, see Jan Michael Joncas, *From sacred song to ritual music: twentieth century understanding of Roman Catholic worship music* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997).

15 For a typology of styles of liturgical music found in the United States, see Virgil Funk, 'Enculturation, style, and the sacred-secular debate', in P. Bradshaw and L. Hoffman (eds), *Sacred sound and social change: liturgical music in Jewish and Christian experience* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp 314–323.

16 One wishes the same were said to liturgical artists, dancers, et al.

17 In the forthcoming third edition of the *General instruction on the Roman missal* (315). This has been followed in a recent document from the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled 'Built of Living Stones'. This reminds the author that the U.S. Bishops found it impossible to agree on an age for confirmation.

18 In this issue, in contrast to music, decisions cannot be changed so easily. One is tempted to re-write the old adage: *cantiones volant, aedificia manent*.

19 John F. Baldovin, 'The changing world of liturgy: the future of Anglican worship', in *Anglican theological review* 82 (2000), pp 65–81.

20 A similar project in terms of discerning patterns is undertaken by Gordon Lathrop, *Holy things: a liturgical theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

21 See John F. Baldovin (ed), *Robert Hovda: the amen corner* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994).

22 This essay was written before the publication of the *Liturgiam authenticam*. That instruction, issued on 7 May 2001, and dealing with the translation of the liturgy into vernacular languages, will, in this author's opinion, have a profoundly negative effect on the liturgical renewal.