

Introductory remarks by Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke

One of the directives established by the Second Vatican Council in the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (n. 16) was that liturgy should be considered one of the ‘most important and necessary’ subjects of study in theological faculties, especially those that train candidates for the priesthood. Unfortunately, we find that this has rarely happened and that the study of liturgy has instead been removed from the curriculum of seminaries and theological faculties. And even if this situation were to be remedied, it would not be easy to do so, because liturgy, in Catholic academia, has almost ceased to be a discipline that calls for research with scientific rigour, contenting itself in most cases with a purely pastoral approach.

It is true, on the other hand, that, as Father Uwe Michael Lang points out in his latest book (*The Roman Mass. From Early Christian Origins to Tridentine Reform*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022; p. 3), the writings of Josef Ratzinger - Pope Benedict XVI - “inspired a new generation of scholars to question the dominant narrative that Roman liturgy had moved from an initial dynamic development to medieval decline and then to early modern stagnation, and also encouraged scholars and ministers to think critically about twentieth-century liturgical reforms and to express their unease about the current state of Catholic liturgy”. This contribution has permeated large sectors of the Church and contributed to the liturgical renaissance of his pontificate.

In addition, some academic centres in the secular sphere have also devoted themselves to the study of the Latin liturgy from perspectives that, while not their own, nevertheless constitute a valuable contribution. Archaeology, literature, history, and even the arts, music and social sciences have had much to say about this ‘cultural’ phenomenon. Social anthropology has also made a contribution by understanding the liturgy as a ‘ritual performance’, offering a new perspective that still has positive aspects.

However, Catholics' interest in the liturgy is not only because it is prescribed by an ecumenical council or because it is a cultural object worthy of study. Pope Francis recently taught that the Mass is the heart of the Church (General Audience of 8 November 2017), and it is also the heart of the liturgy. The Eucharist is therefore for us an act overflowing with life, a life endowed with interiority, depth and unity that is expressed in multiple ways, as in a harmony, or rather a symphony of concordant themes that are gradually orchestrated. It is this shimmering tunic of biblical reminiscences, this sacred garment in which the entire universe is reflected around the Church and her heavenly Spouse.

No poem, no work of art, and even less so any abstract system of thought, could better express this νοῦς Χριστοῦ (intellect of Christ), which is at the same time mens Ecclesiae (intellect of the Church). This is explained by Father Louis Bouyer (*Eucharistie : théologie et spiritualité de la prière eucharistique*, Paris: Declée, 1968, p. 23), who also warns that if, as many claim, the liturgy is deteriorating through wear and tear, routine and sclerosis, it is much more radically distorted by theories that seek to reform it abusively. And in these cases, it is not a matter of simple negligence or a more or less profound forgetfulness. These are errors committed solemnly and on principle which, under the pretext of enriching or reforming, only irreparably spoil or mutilate a structure that has been patiently built up over fifteen centuries.

Our interest in the liturgy also stems from the fact that it is theological. Pope Pius XI said that "the liturgy is the most important organ of the ordinary magisterium of the Church (...) It is not the didacticism of this or that individual, but the didacticism of the Church" (Audience with Dom Bernard Capelle on 12 December 1935), and therefore its study is not limited to the strictly ritual, but also admits a theological approach. But it is, of course, a theology which, while remaining rigorous, expresses in a particularly precise manner the original meaning of the Greek term θεολογία (*theologia*), which refers to a hymn, a glorification of God through the λόγος (*logos*), the expressed thought of man. It is a rational thought, certainly, but one of a reason that is harmony, intellectual music, and whose spontaneous translation is therefore a liturgical hymn. For this very reason, liturgical celebrations that are merely a gathering of the faithful and are not imbued with contemplation or adoration of Christ present in his living mystery celebrated there will soon become one of those mass events so appealing to contemporary paganism, to which a few glimpses of Christianity on an emotional level will be added. The liturgy and the Mass thus end up being a purely social phenomenon that has replaced the opus redemptionis, the profound and immeasurable mystery in which our redemption is renewed through the sacrifice of Christ.

The Church must therefore ensure that scientific studies of the liturgy are also informed by the indispensable supernatural and spiritual aspect. It was precisely to achieve this conjunction that CIEL (*Centre International d'Études Liturgiques*) was founded in 1994 and organised ten years of research and reflection days attended by specialists not only in the field of liturgy but also in other disciplines such as theology, spirituality and philosophy. Both the results and the training it provided to those who participated contributed to the renewal of the Benedictine pontificate that we have just mentioned.

The publication of this first volume of selected proceedings from the CIEL colloquiums is an important contribution to the efforts to provide the Church with serious studies on its liturgy. It is a collection of studies, carried out on a scientific basis, which deal with subjects concerning various aspects of the liturgy. For example, a group of chapters deals with the history and evolution of

liturgical books such as the missal or the pontifical, not only from the point of view of external criticism, which is always necessary, but also from the point of view of the ecclesiology they reflect. Others refer to the characteristics that sacred music must possess, and the valuable testimony of those who were members of the commissions and working groups responsible for the liturgical reform promoted by the Second Vatican Council also appears.

Finally, the study of liturgy, far from being a peripheral issue in Catholic academia, must occupy the prominent place it deserves and, consequently, the Church as a whole must support and promote all initiatives that tend towards rigorous research in this discipline. The fruits of such initiatives, as in the case of the book to which we are writing the prologue, speak eloquently of the excellent results that can be achieved.

Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke