

## **The Origins of the Liturgy and its Guiding Principles**

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### **I – The Divine Origins**

It was from the heart of God that the liturgy was born, when “even before the foundation of the world He chose us in Him to be holy and blameless in His sight through love, predestining us according to His good pleasure to be His adopted sons through Jesus Christ”<sup>2</sup>. Through this election in Christ, God constituted his Holy People, *Plebs sancta*, as the Body of Christ, whose very action would be the liturgy.

### **A - The worship of God in the first creation**

Certainly, in his original state, man—endowed by God with exceptional natural and supernatural perfections—needed no external, corporeal or visible means to receive God’s grace,<sup>3</sup> nor—had he multiplied into a population capable of forming a city that was both human and divine—did he require the intervention of his fellow man as a mediator. The order then prevailing was the reverse of that which we know: the human soul being perfectly subject to its God, the powers of the soul so thoroughly dominated the sensible powers, and these so imperiously commanded the body itself, that the perfect order of human worship, both personal and social, was established solely by the influence of divine action upon the spiritual soul.

In the state of innocence, neither would the Holy People of God have constituted the Church in the strict sense, nor would their spiritual worship have been liturgy in the sense we give it: it would simply have been a *rationabile obsequium* of the whole man and his entire city, as perfect as that of the angelic hosts, a spiritual offering, perfect adoration and sacrifice, but not the conformation to Christ offering himself to the Father in the sacrifice of the Cross. It would therefore not have been the liturgy.

The catastrophe of sin overturned the original harmony. When the Father’s mercy comes to look upon the misery of sinful man, it will be through means now suited to his new situation, to his carnal condition first and foremost, but above all to his sinful condition.

### **B – The Worship of God in the Church**

The Incarnation of the Word of God made God visible to the witnesses whom providential design had placed there. It is from Jesus, from his human contact, his words, his deeds and his suffering, that these Gospel witnesses gather, through their ears, their eyes, all their senses, but

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<sup>2</sup> Eph. 1:4ff.

<sup>3</sup> S.T. 3, q. 61, a.

in their hearts, the mysteries of salvation. To the people whom these same witnesses are to evangelise, the mysteries of salvation are conveyed, transmitted and given in and through the signs they present to their ears and eyes, to all their senses, as bearers of the virtue that flowed from the words, the actions, the Passion, and the whole person of Jesus. Our liturgy has as its immediate source the Sacred Heart of Jesus, from which flowed blood and water, that is to say, the sacraments through which the Church is saved.<sup>4</sup>

The words and gestures of the apostles are now bearers not only of a proclamation, namely that men may enter the Kingdom of God, but bearers of that Kingdom itself: the Gospel word proclaimed in the Church sows the seed of salvation in the man who receives it with living faith. Even more so than in the Gospel Word alone, the apostolic ministry has received the power of saving acts in a number of *corporalia sacramenta*, which are nothing other, in the words of Saint Augustin,<sup>5</sup> than *verba visibilia*: the baptismal bath, accompanied by a profession of faith in the Trinity, brings about the passage from sin to divine life for the person who places their faith in Christ; by eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus, the administration of which was entrusted to the Twelve, the faithful receive eternal life within themselves. The Church has therefore received the truth of salvation, which is the life of Christ in man, and she has received it in the gestures and words that bring it about by signifying it.

The Church is the Mystery, that is to say, God's new and eternal covenant with mankind through Christ, present in the hearts of the faithful who have received him through and in the proclamation of the Gospel, through and in the sacraments. It is the dispensation of the Mystery, and of the mysteries, to the faithful of Christ, within the ecclesial assembly, through the ordained ministers, which is, strictly speaking, the liturgy. The source of this economy is the merciful philanthropy of the Father. The author and consummator of this Covenant is the Son who came to live and suffer in the flesh, who is thus the one and only High Priest and immaculate victim of his own sacrifice: "*Christus per suam passionem initiavit ritum Christianæ religionis, offerens se ipsum oblationem et hostiam Deo* (Eph. 5:2)".<sup>6</sup> The Gift offered to humankind is the Holy Spirit in person, and his sanctifying grace which makes the heart that receives him his temple and sanctuary. What is brought about is that people may have life, eternal life, and have it in abundance. And the dispensation, in the strict sense, is the liturgy that brings salvation through the Word and sacred actions.

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<sup>4</sup> Ordinary commentary on Rom. 5:14, cited in S.T. 3, q. 62, a. 5, s.c.: "*From the side of the sleeping Christ flowed the sacraments, through which the Church was saved*"; a theme taken up by *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 1, no. 3, concerning the birth of the Church. Regarding the liturgy, see Paul VI, *Letter of 25 May 1965 to Superiors General*: "In the Sacred Heart lie the origin and the principle of the sacred liturgy, since it is the holy temple of God, from which the sacrifice of atonement ascends to the eternal Father, 'by which he is able to save to the uttermost those who through him draw near to God (Heb. 7:25)'."

<sup>5</sup> *Contra Faustum*, Book XIX, Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> S.T. 3, q. 62, a. 5, c.

## II – The two elements of the liturgy

The proclamation of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments come together in the liturgy as the two aspects of the same mystery of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in his Church.

### A - Sacred Scripture in the liturgy

The reading of Scripture and the sacramental rite respond to one another, illustrating one another, each in its own distinctive way of teaching. It is a fact: firstly, the sacramental rite is comprehensible, in its full significance, only through the reading of the biblical texts from which it springs ,<sup>7</sup>. Secondly, the liturgical celebration is the proper setting for the reading of Holy Scripture: it was the fact of being read, or not being read, during the liturgy that originally placed a biblical book within the canon of Scripture, or excluded it from it; it is the meaning given to it by the liturgical proclamation and the homily that follows, which constitutes the ‘traditional’—that is, ecclesial—interpretation of the biblical text. Finally, it is to one and the same apostolic ministry that God has entrusted both Holy Scripture and the sacramental rites: neither is the Bible a book that anyone can appropriate for personal and arbitrary use, nor can the sacraments be celebrated “in spirit and in truth” outside the *ecclesia*; the reading of the Holy Scriptures and the administration of the sacraments of the faith are the two complementary aspects of the pastoral activity entrusted by Christ to the “stewards of the mysteries of God”, and they come together in the liturgical celebration.

Of course, church ministers will recognise the distinction that the Lord himself has drawn between these two pastoral functions: the proclamation of the Word of God always precedes the administration of the sacramental rite, just as the imperfect tense precedes and prepares the perfect; the sacrament brings to completion the spiritual work that hearing the Word has gradually brought to maturity. Classical theology recognises that sacramental rites alone possess an efficacy that cannot be attributed to any other moment of the liturgical celebration; nevertheless, it classifies teaching among the sacramenta ux.<sup>8</sup>

In both cases, we indeed have the same ‘structure’ that characterises the apostolic ministry of the New Covenant, namely: firstly, an institution that God’s Providence has ordained for his work of salvation, whether it be the divinely inspired Scripture or the sacramental acts that Christ sanctified by personally inaugurating them during his earthly life; secondly, a ministry commissioned to administer this institution, with a permanent and irrevocable mandate, which the Holy Spirit himself implements and assists; finally, an assembly of Christ’s faithful whom the same Spirit has gathered, through their inner prompting, to be sanctified and led to eternal life: the Spirit leads them there first of all through the faith to which he inclines them in response to the Word of God

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<sup>7</sup> On this subject, see the admirable book by J. DANIELOU, *Bible et liturgie*, Éd. du Cerf, 1951 (Lex Orandi series, 11).

<sup>8</sup> S.T. 3, q. 65, a. 1, ad 3m; Suppl., q. 37, a. 2, c.

proclaimed to them, and then through the sacraments of faith to which he leads them to complete his inner work.

Thus, the Scripture read during the liturgy is recognised as having the same relevance as the sacramental rites themselves: just as it is today now, that baptism brings about the passage from death to life for the person descending into the baptismal font, so too is it today that what is read from Holy Scripture is realised for the faithful who receive it in their hearts with living faith. It is *this 'hodie'* that Saint Leo the Great proclaims with such emphasis, that the great antiphons of the Roman Office sing with such solemnity; the Church has received this *'hodie'* from the very mouth of the Lord, in the pericope from Zacchaeus assigned to the Dedication of Churches, where the entire liturgical work is symbolically expressed: *'hodie salus domui huic facta est'*.<sup>9</sup>

The proclamation of Holy Scripture is therefore an integral part of the liturgical celebration: it suffices to recall the importance it holds in the Masses of the great vigils, that of Easter, and those of the Four Seasons. This proclamation will consequently be entrusted not to just any member of the liturgical assembly, as was nevertheless the case in the synagogue, but to men chosen in advance, who have been permanently appointed; ultimately (and very early on) it will be said: an ordained minister, such as the reader and the subdeacon, the Gospel being reserved for the deacon. All these readings are in fact part of the apostolic mission entrusted to men set apart by the Holy Spirit for the whole Church.

## **B – The sacramenta of the liturgy**

"There is a sacrament in a celebration," teaches Saint Augustine in a masterful passage, "when the commemoration of a past event is carried out in such a way that what is to be received in a holy manner is also

perceived by the intellect as a sign."<sup>10</sup> The past event being commemorated, anamnesis, is the deed of Christ, the *acta et passa Christi in carne*; the reality to be received in a holy manner is God's covenant with man, which the death and resurrection of Christ have sealed, and it is at the same time that which ensures its consistency in man, grace; the sign of this reality is first (chronologically) the Gospel Word that proclaims it, and second (chronologically) the sacramental act that symbolises it and marks its effective intervention. Therein lies the whole of the liturgy.

In the *Letter* in which he gives us this definition of *the sacramentum*, Saint Augustine refuses to regard the solemnity of Christmas as a sacrament, considering it merely a *memoria*, a simple anniversary. It was Saint Leo the Great who would come to understand this, and who would explain it splendidly to his listeners

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 19:9.

<sup>10</sup> Sacramentum est autem in aliqua celebratione, cum rei gestæ commemoratio ita fit, ut aliquid etiam significari intelligatur, quod sancte accipiendum est. Ep. 55, 1.

of the Roman basilicas, that all liturgical solemnities renew for the members, successively over time, the mysteries of salvation accomplished by Christ, the head of the Body that is the Church: they transmit to us the virtue of the works of Christ commemorated .<sup>11</sup>

The liturgy is therefore the coherent implementation of all the *sacramenta* which convey to the faithful of Christ the power of the saving mysteries. What are these *sacramenta*? If we consider the matter from the perspective of the liturgy, which is a *ministerium*, an *officium*, and thus falls within the category of act or action,<sup>12</sup> we must distinguish, on the one hand, the persons, or actors, and, on the other, the acts and actions, among which there are gestures and words.

### **1 - The sacramental characters make the baptised and ordained ministers the actors in the liturgical action.**

Fundamentally, the subject or agent of the liturgy is the Church of God, “the saints in Christ Jesus, together with their deacons and bishops”.<sup>13</sup> Through one aspect of the manifold riches of Christ’s grace, the faithful are made active participants in the liturgy: specifically, through the sacramental signs. Saint Thomas developed a most remarkable doctrine of sacramental characters, centred on the liturgy, “the worship of God according to the rite of the Christian religion”.<sup>14</sup> Sanctifying grace, in its generality, which certainly grants eternal life, is not yet suited to the present conditions of human life, particularly social conditions: it introduces one immediately into the heavenly Kingdom; it adapts man to communion with the Father, and consequently to the City Above, to the heavenly Jerusalem, which has neither temple nor altar; and it structures this City solely according to charity.

#### **a) The baptismal character.**

The faithful, ordained by grace to the glory of the age to come, must therefore still be introduced, through the baptismal bath and the anointing that completes it, to the worship of God according to the specific requirements of the present Church: this is why they are marked by the sacramental characters. It is a matter for the faithful to find in the *sacramenta* of the Church an authentic ‘religion’, to find gestures, words and attitudes that are truly ‘worship of God’, to find in them the religion and worship that correspond to the faith of their baptismal profession. The sacrament of Baptism itself ordains the baptised person to the sacrament of Chrismation and, ultimately, to the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord himself; and the only thing that can account for this ordination to the

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<sup>11</sup> See the fine article by Dom Jean GAILLARD, “Noël, memoria ou mystère?”, in *\*La Maison-Dieu\**, 59 (1959), pp. 37–59.

<sup>12</sup> S.T. 2-2, q. 183, a. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Philippians 1:1.

<sup>14</sup> S.T. 3, q. 63.

other sacraments and the entire sacramental order of the present Church is the sacramental character: in the light of faith, through the fervour of charity which develops the virtue of religion, the faithful of Christ will find, in practice, in and through the various sacraments, the means to render to God the worship he is due.

More precisely, the sacramental character models and configures, as St Thomas says, the faithful to the priesthood of Christ. The faithful's exercise of the worship of God precisely according to the rite of the Christian religion can be nothing other than entering into the offering that Christ made of his Person to his Father: it is not *his* personal worship that the Christian offers to God, but that which Christ offered for all by offering himself, and which he called the faithful to practise by taking part in it, just as members participate in the action of their head. The conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* took up this theme of the sacramental character and participation in the priesthood of Christ and developed it at some length.<sup>15</sup>

#### **b) The character of Holy Orders.**

The sacramental character also, of course, marks those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders in its various degrees. It is then a very particular participation in the priesthood of Christ, which differs from that resulting from Baptism and Confirmation not in degree (which is not possible), but in nature. Through the character of Holy Orders, the Christian is 'delegated' to confer the sacraments on other Christians; he becomes a dispenser of the mysteries of Christ for the benefit of others. The ordained minister is therefore configured to Christ not only insofar as he offers himself to the Father, but also insofar as he acts and suffers his Passion for his People.

#### **\* The priestly order**

The character of the order is itself divided into several analogical participations, which mark the ministers of Christ, the stewards of the mysteries of God, according to the offices entrusted to them, and consequently distinguish them according to the liturgical and ecclesiastical acts incumbent upon them. The episcopate contains the fullness of the sacrament and of the character of the order<sup>16</sup>: the bishop possesses in his person the universality of the apostolic ministry transmitted by the Twelve to their successors<sup>17</sup>; he is the *Summus Sacerdos*<sup>18</sup> in the Church entrusted to his care, where he presides over liturgical life<sup>19</sup>, either personally or through the ministers he ordains to carry it out in his stead; always the

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<sup>15</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 2, nos. 10 & 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 3, nos. 21 & 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 21: "summum sacerdotium, sacri ministerii summa"; cf. *Sacramentarium Veronense*, XXVIII "summi sacerdotii ministerium".

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 26.

The liturgy is celebrated under the authority of the bishop: in that he is *Pontifex*<sup>20</sup>, to use this term from ancient Rome<sup>21</sup>, that is to say, the one who guides and directs the community entrusted to him, and who sets the rules for the other priests and ministers. Surrounding the bishop is the *presbyterium* of his co-workers, who share with him the honour of the priesthood, but under his authority.<sup>22</sup> These priests are charged, as “co-workers of the episcopal order”<sup>23</sup>, with being the bishop’s help and instrument where he cannot be present in person: they therefore celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice itself for the faithful whom the bishop cannot reach every Sunday, as well as the sacraments which do not fall exclusively within the bishop’s jurisdiction.

This structure of the priesthood is one of the most important organising principles of liturgical celebrations: the presence of the bishop gives every celebration its fullness; consequently, the celebration, presided over by one of the priests of the *presbyterate*, is in various ways marked by *that priest’s* dependence on the bishop. Two types of established terms are used to express these two situations: the bishop holds the *Pontificatus apicem* and the Veronese Sacramentary, in the consecratory prayer for the bishop, asks God to grant him *the cathedram pontificalem*; the priest, for his part, holds a *sacerdoce sequentis ordinis et secundæ dignitatis, ... secundi meriti munus*.<sup>24</sup>

#### \* **The diaconal order.**

Deacons bear the name that best expresses the *ministry* of the New Covenant, the apostolic *ministry*: they are ministers, *diakonoï*. This is the title that Saint Paul attributed to himself, the one he gave to his collaborators; the diaconate encapsulates the entire ministry that works towards the building up of the body of Christ. This term is self-explanatory, by its contrast with that of Lord: “there are different kinds of *ministry*, but the same *Lord*”.<sup>25</sup> Whilst we have given the title of *sacerdotes* to ministers who are in the episcopate or the presbyterate, ministers who do not hold the priesthood will retain the simple name of deacons.

Of what, of whom, are deacons ministers? For Saint Ignatius of Antioch, “they are the deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, () they are the deacons of the Church of Jesus Christ”.<sup>26</sup> For his contemporary and colleague Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, “they are the deacons of God and of Christ, and

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 28: “*pontificatus apicem*”; cf. Sacramentarium Veronense, *ibid.* “*pontificalem gloriam*”.

<sup>21</sup> On the meaning of *pontifex* in non-Christian Latin, see Huguette Fugier, *Recherches sur l’expression du sacré dans la langue latine*, thesis, Faculty of Arts, Strasbourg, 1963, pp. 161 ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: “*ordinis Episcopalis providi cooperatores eiusque adiutorium et organum*”; cf. Sacramentarium Veronense, XXVIII, “*ad (episcoporum) societatis et operis adiumentum*”.

<sup>24</sup> Sacramentarium Veronense, *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 12:5.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to the Trallians, 2:3.

“not of men” .<sup>27</sup> Finally, at the beginning of the third century, according to the \*Apostolic Tradition\*, the deacon “is not ordained to the priesthood, but to the service of the bishop, to do whatever the bishop instructs him to do”. These various, seemingly contradictory statements must be understood from an ecclesial perspective and in the light of Jesus’ words *\*non veni ministrari sed ministrare\**: the apostolic ministry or service is always directed towards God, whose plan of grace it serves, *and* towards Christ, of whom it is the instrument, *and* towards the Church, its bishops and its faithful, whether in liturgical duties or in the “diaconia” of charitable works. A multifaceted ministry or service which, because it is the ministry of Christ and of the present Church, and an instrument of Christ in particular for the exercise of the worship of God within the Church, requires ordination through the sacramental laying on of hands by the bishop, and the conferral of a sacramental character. The liturgical celebration requires a specifically diaconal service, both for the service of the altar and the holy mysteries and for the assistance of the participants, assistance which is directed both to the person of the bishop himself and to the assembly as a whole.

**\* The minor orders.**

The competence of deacons covers all non-priestly ministerial acts. There are also subordinate ministers (in relation to deacons), who are called upon to perform specific ministerial functions: the most important are first the lectors, named after their function; then the acolytes and subdeacons, named after their relationship to the deacons: *sequentes*, immediate auxiliaries. This diversification of ministers, corresponding to a variety of functions, or states <sup>28</sup>, remained alive after the end of Antiquity only in the liturgy: even though, increasingly up to the Second Vatican Council, the ritual functions of deacon, subdeacon, acolyte and lector were performed by priests (for the two higher offices) or by laypeople (for the two lower ones), at least the structure of liturgical celebrations has always been organised according to this structure of ministry.

The liturgy has thus kept alive, within its own order, this hierarchical arrangement of the lower ministers which, whilst not of apostolic institution, is nonetheless an element of *the ‘status generalis Ecclesiae’* by virtue of its antiquity (it is mentioned in 251, in a *Letter* of Pope Saint Cornelius), by virtue of its catholicity (it exists, more or less completely, in all Churches, both Eastern and Western), and by virtue of its usefulness in dealing, in an effective, orderly and harmonious manner, with the variety of liturgical, or more generally, ecclesial activities. The concept of *generalis status Ecclesiae* is primarily canonical in nature and refers to the constitution and public order of the Church; in this sense, the variety of ministries must be expressed in liturgical celebrations insofar as they are public acts of the ecclesial community.

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<sup>27</sup> Letter to the Philippians, 5:2.

<sup>28</sup> On this question of the “birth of the hierarchy”, see the various works of Alexandre Faivre, of the University of Strasbourg II, in particular “Naissance d’une hiérarchie”, 1977, and the dossier “Les diacres à l’époque paléochrétienne” in *Connaissance des Pères de l’Église*, March 1995 (57).

St Thomas , s. <sup>29</sup>, also presented (though without using the expression) a very beautiful theological and spiritual vision, fundamentally ecclesial, of *the generalis status Ecclesiae*, in a commentary he made on the verse from Psalm 44, “*circumdata varietate*” or “*circumamicta varietatibus*”: “the King’s daughter (i.e. the Church) is clothed in garments of varied fabrics and colours”. This interpretation can be applied to the diversity of liturgical ministries.

### **c) The rationale behind the diversity of ministries.**

This diversity of ministries contributes to the perfection of the Church and of the liturgical assembly: for whilst the fullness of grace is entirely concentrated in Christ as the Head, in this world, which is one of multiplicity and diversity, this fullness can only reach the Church through its diverse members, and this gives rise to the various ministries, which thus contribute to the perfection of the whole ecclesial Body and of the liturgical assembly. The number and variety of ministers will ensure the perfection of liturgical assemblies in two ways: on the one hand, in that the diversity of liturgical actions will be ensured without confusion, thus avoiding, as requested by the conciliar constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a single priest being seen in turn as a reader, acolyte, cantor, deacon and finally exercising the priesthood; on the other hand, in that the regular order of the actions lends the celebration noble dignity and pure beauty.

Thus, the sacramental characteristics structure the Church present for the liturgical actions: they distinguish the members of the liturgical assembly from other people who cannot take part in it; they distinguish, within the liturgical assembly itself, on the one hand those who, whilst performing for themselves the worship of God according to the rite of the Christian religion, also exercise a ministry of dispensation for the benefit of others, and on the other hand those who perform this worship of God solely for themselves and are recipients of the dispensation of ordained ministers; finally, they distinguish, even amongst those who exercise a ministry for the benefit of others, various complementary degrees that are harmoniously coordinated.

This structure is entirely of a sacramental nature. On the one hand, indeed, it derives from the sacraments received (or not received), and is ordered towards the dispensation and reception of the sacraments. On the other hand, and above all, this structure is founded on a reality—the character—which is purely instrumental in nature: it is neither a mere legal authorisation (which exists only in the realm of reason), nor a physical power of this world (a being of flesh and blood), but a dependence of a supernatural order, a mark of Christ, a participation in the priesthood of Christ, a configuration to Christ in whom the fullness of the priesthood personally resides and through whom the priestly action is exercised in its fullness. Such a mark and configuration places the faithful

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<sup>29</sup> S.T. 2-2, q. 183, a. 2 & 3.

or the minister of the sacraments in dependence on the priestly action of Christ, the Author and Consummator of all our worship.

This dependence of our entire liturgy on Christ, on his Sacrifice and on his Priesthood, by virtue of the sacramental characters, further makes every liturgical assembly a true Church. The liturgical assembly, which is convened by the Holy Spirit, derives all its “powers” from the Head of the Church, and through Him it attains to the supreme worship, the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, whose specific effect is to build, to “form” the Church or the Body of Christ. If we borrow “political” vocabulary, we might say that the liturgical assembly is neither a private gathering of individuals nor a domestic gathering: for these, in fact, share only in particular goods and are by nature incomplete; the liturgical assembly, on the contrary, is a properly “political” assembly, an assembly of the city, possessing and exercising sovereign “powers”, and attaining to the highest goods. The liturgical assembly is the principal manifestation of the Church of God; it is an epiphany of the mystery of the Church.<sup>30</sup>

It was necessary to emphasise this doctrine of sacramental character and its consequences: it is the key to a proper understanding of liturgical actions.

## **2 - The seven sacraments, the sacramentals and the Divine Office are the three types of liturgical actions**

Liturgical actions are in fact of several kinds. It is important to understand why, apart from the seven sacraments which form the heart of them, the whole of these actions, and each of their elements, constitute *the authentic leitourgia, actio publica*, of the Church.

### **a) The Seven Sacraments**

It is undoubtedly unnecessary to elaborate at length on the doctrine of the seven sacraments as liturgical acts. It should be noted, however, that the theological analysis of St Thomas Aquinas, which for most of us has inspired our theological formation regarding the sacraments, is not approached from a liturgical perspective. We should bear this in mind when we, as liturgists, make use of these writings.

The seven sacraments, and each one of them, embody par excellence the Augustinian definition of *the sacramentum*. But, as St Thomas admirably demonstrated<sup>re31</sup>, there is an order amongst them, and indeed several orders depending on different perspectives. The recognition of the same sacramental quality in the seven liturgical acts or ecclesiastical institutions known by this name took place, as we know, only gradually and not without hesitation: the life

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<sup>30</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium, nos. 41 & 2.

<sup>31</sup> S.T. 3, q. 65, a. 2, 3 and 4.

of the Church did not lead to such a radical assimilation of baptism, for example, and penance, and it is not difficult to understand the reluctance of the ancients to place the Eucharistic celebration and marriage on the same footing.

It is in the article where he orders all the sacraments around the Eucharist, the most worthy of the seven, that St Thomas comes closest to a liturgical consideration.<sup>32</sup> There he notes, on the one hand, that all the sacraments and all hierarchical offices or ministries are ordered towards the Eucharist as their end – which, incidentally, allows him to highlight the distance of marriage within this order; on the other hand, that “most” of the sacraments are consummated in the Eucharist, that is to say, are normally celebrated within the framework of a Mass and find their fulfilment in participation in the Eucharistic banquet: Baptism and Confirmation during the Mass of the Easter Vigil, the Vigil of Pentecost, or that of the Epiphany; ordination, up to and including the priesthood, during the Mass on Saturdays of the Four Seasons; episcopal ordination during a Sunday Mass; solemn penance during the Masses on Ash Wednesday and Holy Thursday. Here we have an overview of the major liturgies of the Church, as the Apostolic Tradition already shows them to us, for the most part, at the beginning of the third century.

Moreover, it is only by analogy that the seven fulfil the nature of a sacrament. The Eucharist is, as the Council has repeatedly emphasised, *fons et culmen*<sup>33</sup> not only of the entire sacramental order, but also of the whole activity of the Church; and inasmuch as it contains Christ himself, the common good of the whole Church, and inasmuch as, in its celebration, Christ is sacrificed and offers himself as a pleasing victim to his Father for the whole Church. It is therefore quite rightly that Greek usage reserves the name ‘divine liturgy’ for the Eucharistic celebration alone. On the basis of this primary *analogy*, other acts within the Church may be described as liturgical: on the one hand, of course, the six other sacraments, in the order we have already mentioned; but also any celebration whose purpose is a work of sanctification through the power of Christ’s saving mysteries. We shall see a little later that this is the case with the major “independent” sacramentals, which in themselves represent a liturgical function, such as funerals, the nuptial blessing, or the dedication of a church, etc. Here we must first mention (briefly) the Divine Office, *the Opus Dei* in the language of St Benedict.

## **b) The Divine Office**

The psalms and canticles of the Old and New Testaments were, from very early on, the subject of a very special use, both by the faithful individually and by ecclesial assemblies or

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ch. 1, n. 11; *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 2, n. 11; cf. Pius XII, encycl. *Mediator Dei*: “*caput ac veluti centrum*”.

liturgical, a use which naturally reflects their very nature as prayer, and as sung and communal prayer. The singing of psalms and hymns may have constituted, in itself, the *raison d'être* of a liturgical assembly, with a limited number of psalms selected in the 'cathedral-style' service, as opposed to a continuous recitation of numerous psalms in the 'monastic-style' service.<sup>34</sup> In both cases, these assemblies fulfil the precept of prayer, and of continuous prayer. But there is more, if we recall what we said regarding the use of Holy Scripture in the liturgy. The psalms and hymns are not merely the voice of the faithful at prayer; rather, they are the voice of the Church at prayer; above all, they are the voice of Christ: "*vox Christi*" – "*vox Ecclesiae*" – are the "titles" that recur constantly in the *Tituli Psalmorum* of Latin Psalter manuscripts.<sup>35</sup> The multifaceted prayer expressed in the psalms is the expression of the mystery of salvation in Christ, in all its aspects: from the eternal birth of the Word (Psalm 2) to the endless Alleluia of all redeemed creation (Psalm 150), passing through the agony of the redemptive Passion (Psalm 21). The Christian assembly, in taking up all this psalmody, thereby enters into the mysterious plan of salvation through Christ, whose Holy Spirit inspired the ancient singers of Israel to express it so admirably: "When the Church takes up these texts in her liturgy, she does so in the present reality of the mystery of worship, in all truth," wrote Fr Gelineau quite rightly – using the Caselian vocabulary then in vogue. The ecclesial singing of the psalms and hymns is truly a liturgical work, analogous to that of the sacramental celebrations. The bishop and the other liturgical ministers participate in their own right as liturgists in those parts—which are, moreover, non-psalmonic—that fall within their competence, such as the litanies or the concluding prayers: we see this as early as the descriptions of the pilgrim Egeria towards the end of the 4th century.

### **III – The Development of the Liturgy in the 4th–6th Centuries A – Introduction. The Simplicity of Liturgical Celebrations**

Compared to those of the Old Law, the sacraments of the New Law, writes Saint Augustine, are *now easier, numero pauciora*, "easier to perform and fewer in number, as is fitting now that the justice which comes from faith has been revealed, and that the children of God, delivered from the yoke of servitude which was made for a hard and carnal people, are called to freedom"<sup>36</sup> The simplicity of the seven sacraments is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Gospel. The sacramental celebration never presents anything marvellous to be gazed at with curiosity, nor

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<sup>34</sup> On the whole question of the Office, see the recent synthesis by R. TAFT, *La Liturgie des Heures en Orient et en Occident*, Brepols, 1991.

<sup>35</sup> Edited by Dom Pierre SALMON, *Les "Tituli Psalmorum" des manuscrits latins*, (Collectanea Biblica Latina, vol. XII), Rome, 1959, and (coll. Études Liturgiques) Cerf, Paris 1959.

<sup>36</sup> *Contra Faustum*, Book XIX, Chapter 13; cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theologica* 1, Q. 108, a. 1 & 2.

no action capable of satisfying our natural restlessness, not even elaborate speeches to be listened to with passion, although the spoken word plays a very important part: nothing to hold the attention of the congregation. And if, as is possible, the priest celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice finds himself facing the assembly of the faithful, it will not be the very thin elements of bread and wine, nor the priest's very basic gestures, that will be able to sustain the interest of these faithful—unless their living faith and their religion draw them into the spiritual movement of the Church which offers the sacrifice of its Head, and offers itself in him, to the Father. The active and conscious participation called for by Saint Pius X and by the Magisterium following him<sup>e38</sup> is present here, just as the Council taught with insistence.

The simplicity of the *sacramenta* of the New Law, and their small number, are facts that emerge just as clearly from the earliest witnesses to the liturgy, such as the descriptions of Saint Justin in the 2nd century, or those of the 'Apostolic Tradition' in the 3rd century. The celebrations of the baptismal bath, the Eucharistic sacrifice, the laying on of hands, etc., require, for their ritual form and liturgical formulae, only to draw upon the Gospel tradition and, to an extent that is difficult to ascertain precisely, upon the Jewish family customs which Our Lord adopted, particularly at the Last Supper. The great liturgy of the Temple of Jerusalem, with its priests and Levites, with its countless sacrifices and offerings of every kind, disappears without being taken up by the liturgy of the Church: it was figurative and a foreshadowing of what was fulfilled in Christ, and therefore no longer had any reason to exist. It is important to emphasise this, in order to guard against the misleading interpretations that will soon emerge.

## **B - The Development**

It was, however, a phenomenon of considerable magnitude that began to take shape following the peace of the Church, from the start of the 4th century onwards. Liturgical celebrations gradually underwent a development that no one could have foreseen. The Church's new status within the Empire led it to celebrate its services with far greater resources than it had previously employed. A profusion of Eucharistic formulas, rites, chants and various observances began to emerge, the variations of which from one church to another the historian Socrates endeavours to describe for us. It is from this proliferation that the two complementary movements of liturgical diversification and the unification of liturgies around and under the authority of the major episcopal sees will arise, thus giving birth to liturgical families and various rites. It is not possible for us to examine all the areas in which this expansion took place; let us merely attempt to highlight them.

<sup>37</sup> St Pius X, brief *Tra le sollecitudini* (22 November 1903).

<sup>38</sup> Pius XI, Apostolic Constitution *Divini cultus* (20 December 1928); Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1949); *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Chapter 1, No. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 5, Chapter 22.

## 1 - The sacramentals

First and foremost – in terms of intrinsic importance – comes the development of what later theologians would call the ‘sacramentals’. These are like ‘duplicates’ of the central sacramental rite, serving a pedagogical purpose: they are intended to prepare the faithful for the reception of the sacrament, and to help them receive all its effects, both before and after the central rite. The Church’s pedagogy, like that of God, is not merely explanatory and discursive: it possesses its own efficacy—the efficacy of her prayer, which God always hears; the efficacy of the powers granted to her by the Lord Jesus; *the exousia* that Christ has entrusted to her to combat opposing forces. Sacramentals put these two aspects of the Church’s spiritual power into practice. They develop either around the sacramental rites or even independently of them to constitute specific liturgical functions.

## 2 - The liturgical year

After that of the sacramentals, the most significant development in the liturgy from the 4th century onwards is that which, whilst not giving rise to it in the strictest sense, at least developed the liturgical calendar considerably and in a highly original manner. Nothing in the Christian liturgy handed down from the apostolic generation could give rise to celebrations of fixed times and ‘feasts’: had not the Apostle explicitly rejected any idea of reintroducing into the ‘law of liberty’ practices concerning feast days, new moons and Sabbaths :<sup>40</sup>? All this can only be a shadow of the reality that is Christ; indeed, they are merely elements of this world, under whose bondage the Christian certainly does not wish to fall again. The sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist contain and apply at all times the same and unique reality: death to the world, life to God through Jesus Christ, by virtue of his Passion and Resurrection: nothing, once again, that could mark any difference between days. To mark anniversaries and annual solemnities would have been to Judaize, to turn back and to erase the Christian novelty.

But where exactly did the tradition of annual celebrations originate? In the case of Easter, it stems from the very nature of the sacraments, in conjunction with the Gospel readings. The memory of the calendar ‘date’ of Easter is so deeply ingrained in the Gospels that it could not fail to resurface in certain Churches – perhaps still marked by a Judeo-Christian spirit? What was undoubtedly at stake in the Easter controversy at the end of the 2nd century was not so much the question of the precise date, but rather the very act of fixing a date for an Easter feast: for Churches of pagan origin, this was a Jewish practice <sup>r41</sup>. Be that as it may, the reading of the resurrection Gospels

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<sup>40</sup> Col. 2:16.

<sup>41</sup> See R. CABIE, “On the ‘Easter Question’: what practice was opposed to that of the Quartodecimans?”, in *Ecclesia Orans*, 1994, I, pp. 101–106.

followed by the celebrations of baptism and the Eucharistic sacrifice readily paved the way for a “special” Paschal solemnity, setting it apart, however slightly, from the weekly Pascha of the “Sunday” day.

It seems clear that the establishment of all the other days thus assigned to some mystery of the Lord has its origin in “splits” of the Easter solemnity, through the assignment of Gospel readings concerning a particular event or mystery: Christmas, the Easter season ultimately giving rise to Pentecost, etc. Whilst the sacraments celebrated can scarcely, in themselves, give rise to these anniversary solemnities, Sacred Scripture can assume this role – as it did under the Old Covenant! The difference lies in the fact that, in the Church, these solemnities are never anything other than one or another aspect of the reality found in the sacraments: it is therefore not merely a matter of “memory”, but rather of “mystery”, or of “sacrament”, as we said above.

If only a few dates, scattered here and there throughout the year, had been designated as solemnities, we would have had the impression of a ‘pointillist’ approach, rather than that of a continuous progression. The gradual institution<sup>42</sup>, of the pre-Easter Quarantenary, followed by the post-Easter Cinquantenary, will fill more than three months of the year in a continuous manner. Christmas and the Epiphany can thus take on the appearance of the beginning of an annual cycle, which unfolds in accordance with the very progression of the Gospel narrative, from the Annunciation (the Wednesday of the Four Weeks of Advent) to Pentecost.

This function of the liturgical reading of the Gospel also entails the assignment to the various solemnities of the psalm texts relating to them: Jesus had inaugurated this exegesis of the psalms as well as of the entire Old Testament<sup>43</sup>, and the Fathers have consistently continued it. Such use of texts drawn from the psalms is made all the easier by the fact that the development of chant allows only a single verse to be retained—the one that is expressive—without having to repeat the entire psalm.

### 3 - The Euchologion

The 4th and 5th centuries saw further considerable development in the Eucharistic liturgy : these were the centuries of the Christian word, the centuries of the eloquence of the greatest of the Fathers, and also those of the formulation of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas; the era when the bishops of *the oikoumene* passionately embraced the conciliar assemblies and their oral debates; a torrent of eloquence flowed throughout the *Catholic Church*. In this context, the Eucharistic liturgy, along with hymnology, gradually took on perfected forms, in both the East and the West, by

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<sup>42</sup> A very clear outline of this, accompanied by diagrams, can be found in Cyrille VOGEL, *Introduction aux sources de l'histoire du culte chrétien au Moyen Age*, Spoleto, 1965, pp. 269 ff.

<sup>43</sup> On this assignment of psalm verses, or entire psalms, to various liturgical solemnities, see André ROSE, *Les Psaumes, Voix du Christ et de l'Église*, ed. P. Lethielleux, Paris, 1981.

Rome as in Spain. Saint Ambrose is already the witness to the central part of the Canon of the Roman Mass, the wording of which would be further refined before the first Sacramentaries.

In this area too, the liturgical traditions differ: in the East, the form of the Mass is fixed; only the choral parts are variable. In Rome, the central part of the Canon is fixed, but the prayers and the preface are variable: the beginning of one of the most admirable forms of liturgical literature in existence, though far removed from the splendours of Greek or Syriac hymnography. In Spain, all the parts of the Eucharistic liturgy are variable, including the Eucharistic prayer. The Roman model spread throughout the West, imposing its brevity, its theological precision, and its pure objectivity: we owe it a wealth of treasures! Readings from Holy Scripture, the singing of psalms and hymns, prayers and Eucharistic prayers: the spoken voice alone is not enough; singing is required. We know nothing of chant before the 7th–8th centuries, but we surmise that ‘Old Roman’ chant must have originated further back.

#### **4 - The ceremonial**

We must also mention the entire development of the external trappings of liturgical celebrations: the immense and sumptuous basilicas that Constantine had built in Rome or in his city of Constantinople, the vestments and insignia now worn by bishops, priests, deacons and lower ministers, *the entire ordo* according to which liturgical functions are performed.

This last subject is far more significant than it might appear at first glance: the “ceremonial”, as it would later be called, reflects – and betrays – the way in which ministers and the faithful perceive and feel the value of the liturgical action they perform. It is by no means a question of “style”, nor even of “spirit”.

We have already emphasised this: the liturgical assembly is the Church of God; it possesses the character of a city, inasmuch as it exercises sovereign powers and attains to the highest goods. It does not behave like a family in the simplicity of its domestic life – though the heavenly Father admits it into his familiarity and intimacy, *domestici Dei*.

It behaves with the “gravity” (please forgive this word, which sounds almost ridiculous at the end of this century) that is required in the public acts of the members of the City Above, *cives sanctorum*. This can be understood either within the austere framework of Roman majesty, or in the profusion of incense, lamps and icons of the Byzantine-style ritual.

Rome has left us a record of its solemn celebration of the Mass: *the Ordo romanus primus*, as it has been known since its publication under that name by Dom Mabillon.

This is an authentically Roman description of the Easter Station Mass celebrated by the Pope; the text dates from the late 7th century. From the following century onwards, *the \*Ordo primus\** spread throughout Frankish Gaul, where it served as a model for numerous *\*ordines\** intended to

introduce Roman customs into these regions: it thus became the progenitor of a long line of ceremonial books, which has not yet died out. A detailed commentary on *the Ordo romanus primus* would enable us to illustrate the principles we have sought to identify.

#### **IV- Conclusion**

We shall borrow this assessment of the body of work from the early centuries of the Church from a specialist in Christian Latin ( , p. 44):

"Without abandoning what the early Christian centuries had created within the isolation of the primitive communities, the fourth and fifth centuries brought about a rapprochement between the two worlds, the Christian world and the ancient world. This rapprochement, far from being a dilution of Christian culture, enriched and deepened it by adding precious human values to the heritage of the early Christian centuries.

"The so-called Gelasian Canon (Roman Canon), in its solemn, sometimes legalistic verbosity, presents us with an admirable example of this alliance between *Romanitas* and *Christianitas*, which would remain throughout the centuries one of the most characteristic features of the liturgy of Rome."

Having thus outlined the principles that governed the birth of the Church's liturgy, all that remains is to invite you to enter into the liturgical action; we shall extend this invitation by taking up the words of this antiphon from the Ambrosian liturgy , no. 45:

*Come, people, to the sacred and immortal mystery and the libation to be offered: let us approach with fear and faith; with clean hands, let us share in the gift of penance; for the Lamb of God has been offered as a sacrifice to the Father for our sake: let us worship him alone, let us glorify him, crying out with the angels: Alleluia.*

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<sup>44</sup> Christine MOHRMANN, *Études sur le latin des chrétiens*, Rome, 1961, vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup> Text from *the Processionale monasticum*, Solesmes, 1893; the same text, with a few variations, taken from the *Paléographie musicale* de Solesmes, vol. 13, in E. LODI, *Enchiridion Euchologicum Fontium Liturgicorum*, Rome, 1979, no. 2159.