



REVIEW

Liturgy and Liturgical Formation by Romano Guardini, translated by Jan Betz, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 2022, pp. xii + 147, \$22.00, pbk

Romano Guardini (1885–1968) is rightly regarded as one of the foremost Catholic minds of the twentieth century, helping to shape Catholic theology between the two World Wars, and exercising a considerable influence on the thought of both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. In particular, Guardini is highly regarded as a pioneer in liturgical theology, starting with his influential work *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1918) and continuing almost to his death. This new volume, published by Liturgy Training Publications of the Archdiocese of Chicago, presents the first English translation of Guardini’s work *Liturgical Formation (Liturgische Bildung)*, originally published in 1923. In fact, the book is itself an anthology, translated from the 1992 German edition *Liturgie und Liturgische Bildung* produced by the German-language publisher Matthias Grünewald Verlag (whose notes are helpfully reproduced in this volume as additional footnotes). Alongside the 1923 *Liturgical Formation* (c.2) are included a letter to the Third Liturgical Congress of Mainz (1964, c.1), *On Liturgical Mystery* (1925, c.3), *Historical Action and Cultic Event* (1960, c.4), and a 1940 letter to Bishop Stohr of Mainz *A Word about the Liturgical Question* (c.5). The book opens with a helpful Foreword and Preface – both highlighting the significance of the writings which follow – and also a useful Translator’s Note, detailing his approach to translating Guardini’s dense and complex prose and numerous neologisms.

As an anthology covering works from 1923 to 1960, the various ‘chapters’ vary considerably, both in the density of their thought and in their accessibility to the reader. Most approachable are cc.4 and 5. The letter to Bishop Stohr (c.5) is Guardini’s poignant description of the difficulties encountered in considering ‘the Liturgical Question’, that is, the various different (and highly polarised) approaches of groups within the Liturgical Movement – whether archaeologising ‘conservatists’ (*Konservatisten*) or quasi-secular ‘practicalists’. What is most striking is how this letter from Guardini to his friend can be seen as almost a ‘first draft’ of Pius XII’s 1947 Encyclical *Mediator Dei* – the first encyclical on the Liturgy. Equally approachable is the delightfully-written c.4 – *Historical Action and Cultic Event*. Here, Guardini explains the gradual transition from Last Supper to Eucharistic Liturgy – the transformation of the historical *action* of Jesus’ words and actions into the liturgical *event* of the celebration ‘not based on a teaching but on a reality – that is, on the ever-renewing presence of Christ in her midst’. The Eucharist is not an historical re-enactment, nor a dramatic mystery-play; ‘it is Christ who speaks and acts’. It is a beautiful and profound adumbration of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §.7, published 3 years later.


A more complex text, although related to c.4, is found in c.3 – *On Liturgical Mystery* from 1925. Here, Guardini examines the ‘content’ of the Christian mystery, simply summarised as: *the liturgy has indeed no content other than the person, the life, the word and the actions of the Lord*. He then examines the meaning of *commemoration* – that is, how

the saving act of the Christian mystery can be communicated across generations so that all are saved – through a long discussion of the nature of time, space, and history. He finally settles on the concept of the *aeviternal* – a mediaeval term combining *aevum* (age, time) and *aeternum* (the eternal) – that God, himself outside time and space, is constantly related to the time and space of his Creation, the point of contact, as it were, being Christ. It is an attractive and persuasive argument, despite its complexity.

The most challenging texts are cc.1 and 2. The more accessible is c.1 – *The Cultic Act and the Contemporary Task of Liturgical Formation*. Another letter, this time from 1964, it examines with some urgency (in the light of the Council) the task ahead and raises important questions regarding liturgical formation to promote the called-for active participation. Textual and ritual renewal, Guardini notes, will be the ‘easy task’; much more difficult will be the genuine formation of the faithful for the Liturgy in a post-Enlightenment world which has lost its appreciation of symbol, of true humanity and Christian community, and of the reality of the Divine, and therefore the ‘reality’ which the Liturgy expresses. As Guardini himself notes: ‘Today the problems lie beyond reading and writing [i.e. intellectual formation], but rather in learning how to gaze lively at something’. How do we instinctively ‘read’ the liturgy so that, in it, we genuinely encounter God?

These questions are explored in more detail in c.2, *Liturgical Formation* from 1923. This is a long and very difficult text (this reviewer took three attempts even to scratch its surface). It explores in considerable philosophical depth issues of human nature – that the liturgical participant is a *person*, both body and soul – of symbol and meaning, of the search both for authenticity and for participation in the interior life of the Trinity through the cultic action. The text has a complex history. Originally written in 1922, it was updated for publication in 1966 – which may explain some of its opaqueness. It seems to come from a different world to the other texts – the world of a ‘fortress Church’ of scholastic thought on which Biblical/Patristic theology has made little impact. Confusingly, whilst much is ‘controversial’ in style, it is not always clear who Guardini’s interlocutors actually are. Equally, there is a strong sense of ‘romantic mediaevalism’ – a charge which Guardini acknowledges but does not successfully evade. Finally, and most disappointingly, whilst it raises many issues which imperil modern liturgical formation, it offers few convincing answers. If ever there were a text which cries out for a detailed commentary to accompany it, this is it.

I suspect this is a book more for scholars than for pastors or the general reader, though the latter might profit from much of it. As an entry into some aspects of Guardini’s thinking hitherto less accessible in English, it is a real achievement. Similarly, the questions it raises about liturgical formation are real and important, perhaps even more so today than when Guardini first wrote these texts. Anyone seeking a *programme* for liturgical formation will be disappointed – but at least the author has focussed our minds on the issues we face in tackling this vital challenge.

Oswald McBride OSB 
 Ampleforth Abbey, York, UK
 Email: oswald@ampleforthabbey.org.uk