

## LITURGICAL EDUCATION

“THE way to liturgical life does not go through mere teaching but before all it goes through doing.”<sup>1</sup> These words of Doctor Guardini go straight to the heart of the difficulty of liturgical revival. The numerous liturgical societies and periodicals of to-day are so varied in their matter and their treatment of it, that one is sometimes at a loss to discover in them any common purpose. They all profess to have at heart the cultivation of a conscious liturgical life in the Catholic community; but the various aspects and studies of liturgy in which they indulge cannot all claim to have an equally important share in promoting this end. And indeed it is difficult to see where many of them have led or are going to lead at all. Their journals appear and their summer schools are held with unflinching regularity, yet one fails to discern any results beyond a keener appreciation of the beauty of Plainchant or Gothic vestments. This is very good in its way, but it is not all; and we are so often given the impression that it is all. Liturgy is more than this: it is a life, and therefore not something merely to be learnt; above all it is something that must be done—lived; and living is not brought about just by introducing Plainchant or studying the history or art of the liturgy;—these material adjuncts are all necessary in their own place as long as they do not degenerate into dilettante aestheticism or moribund archeology—but before all else it must be realized that liturgical life is essentially based on theological principles. If then this life is to be lived, the people must be instructed in these principles. In the words of a writer in *Orate Fratres*: “The first requisite for the liturgical outlook is one of spirit. Liturgy is a piety, a piety that rests on certain metaphysical principles . . . The restoration of the liturgy to its rightful place in the esteem of Catholics can and will only be achieved in measure as the first principles of

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<sup>1</sup> Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs*, p. xiii.

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theology are again made the matter of religious instruction.''<sup>2</sup>

Such instruction must begin with an explanation of the real meaning of liturgy itself. Though this ought to be most obvious it is very sadly neglected; and it is because of this neglect that liturgical schools so easily become centres of devitalized aestheticism and archaeology. Liturgical action is not first and foremost an exercise of the artistic faculty, nor is it a revival of ancient formulae of prayer: these are only very secondary elements—the clothing of the liturgy. In the first place liturgy means nothing more than a public act—*λειτον ἔργον*. In any society there must be a number of such acts which can be described as public, social or common indiscriminately. The distinguishing feature of them is that they are of the society as such, that is to say, though they must of necessity be performed by individual persons, they are performed by these persons acting precisely in their capacity as members of the society and not as self-subsistent individuals. Since the most social of social actions must be performed through one or more individual members of the social body, it follows that in the individual public and private acts can be discerned—in one case the individual acting in his capacity as member of the society, a channel through which the social organization expresses itself, and which acts only with the power of the common body—in the other acting precisely as individual with his own personal power.

Likewise in the Church, as in any other society, such an order exists; and it is in acts specifically public that the liturgy consists. The merit of such acts lies in the fact that they are of the whole social entity—the society, which in this case is Christ Himself—the Mystical Christ.

By Baptism men become part and parcel of Christ's humanity which was used as the instrument of our redemption; and because of this incorporation they acquire the power to perform liturgical acts, for, once incorporated in Christ, they begin to live with the life with which Christ lives and with which the Church lives, and this life it is which

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<sup>2</sup> Rev. F. C. Falque. *The Liturgical Spirit in Reform*, in *Orate Fratres*, March 21, 1937.

motivates all liturgical activity. Hence a baptized person has a divine power—*virtus*—communicated to him whereby he becomes capable of liturgical activity. When he actually performs these acts he does so precisely as a *member* of the society. Therefore the acts are not acts of the member except instrumentally, but radically they are of the whole body, and thus they are informed by a divine life and grace. So the member, for the time being, loses his personality and lives and acts in the Person of Christ: he becomes in very truth an “Alter Christus” since he really lives and acts by the same divine life by which Christ lives and acts. This of course, does not imply any diminution of his natural powers, but rather a perfection of them by an *accidental* supernatural change. When St. Paul expressed this truth in these words: “Now no longer I live, but Christ liveth in me,” this was no mere metaphor but a bare statement of the truth.

The merit of liturgical action will spring from man’s realization of this rather than from his appreciation of the beauty of the Chant or the significance of the various sacred vestments. And it is just here that the importance of understanding is so easily abused. It is certainly most important that a man should know what he is doing when he takes part in the liturgy; but he does this first and foremost by appreciating what it means to be a member of Christ, to live and act by Christ’s divine life, and it is by no means *equally* important that he should appreciate the material beauty of the externals of the liturgy. His first duty is to “cast off the old man” of self by conformity to liturgical laws. Here lies the secret of true liturgical action—that by a thorough obedience the member conforms perfectly to the head thus participating in the most perfect way possible in the supernatural actions of the Mystical Christ.

This then is the first thing which the laity must be taught about the liturgy, namely the meaning of it and their part in it as members of Christ. This incorporation in Christ is a very real thing and not something “mystical” in the false sense of that word: not something merely mysterious, but the expression of some hidden spiritual truth in external

forms, that is, something sacramental. They must be brought to realize the truth and the implications of all this—that it means the “supernaturalization” of themselves in the Mystical Christ, the shedding of their personality and conformity to the Person of the Son of God. This hidden spiritual truth is the only justification for all the externals of the liturgy, and if these externals are attended to without due consideration of the underlying doctrine they become a mere fetish.

Therefore it is with instruction in this theology that liturgical revival must *start*. But this instruction must be given, not, as so often is the case, as something for the élite, a super-rarefied doctrine only fit to be represented to and understood by the initiated; it must be shown to be a vital factor of Catholic life in which all who are “born again of water and the Holy Ghost”<sup>3</sup> have a right to participate. In a word, the theology of the liturgy must be made a matter of instruction for *all*—not reserved for the Sunday afternoon Plainsong class. Moreover it must come first. It must be given its due place before all those secondary elements such as the art and music of the liturgy about which we hear so much. It must be appreciated for what it is—the soul of the liturgy as distinct from its material expression.

Yet even this is not all; for the practice of these principles will not *ipso facto* follow on the knowledge. The doctrine must be presented in a live practical manner as something to be done as well as learnt. The liturgical apostolate is not concerned with giving knowledge and leaving it at that, but with giving knowledge which is going to bear fruit in action. Therefore the manner of imparting such knowledge will be modified by this fact, and the teacher must endeavour to provide for and suggest to his hearer ways and means of practising the principles taught.

The first step is to insist on the practical import of all knowledge. And this is where so much liturgical activity fails. Far too often instruction is given as if it were a new discovery or speculation, rather high-flown and above the ordinary run of life. This is deadly. To start with, it ex-

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<sup>3</sup> John. III. 5.

cludes all those who have the honesty to admit that such talk is above them; and, secondly, it is highly doubtful if it means any more than intellectual acrobatics to those who can understand it. To present instruction in such a manner is nothing more than an outright denial of the real value of any theology whatsoever.

If, however, the teaching is imparted in the right manner, the *doing* will follow from it. When it does come " . . . it must be a doing—and a true doing, not mere practising that it may be well known."<sup>4</sup> That is, it must be an intelligent and deliberate action, the doer knowing what he is doing—what inner spirit he is expressing in outward terms—and willing so to express it. Madame Montessori, the well-known Catholic pedagogist, tells how, in one of her schools, the children are taught how to express in their bodily actions the ideas and wishes of the soul; there is a vineyard and a wheatfield where they grow and make their own bread and wine according to the prescriptions of the Church, and then bring this to the altar of the Sacrifice of the Mass. This is indeed a real doing—but only in so far as the children know and will what they are doing; in so far, namely, as they realize that in those material activities of cultivating vines and baking bread they are truly participating in the Mass, the most perfect liturgical act. Their participation may be somewhat remote, but it is none the less real.

It is only by the means of such practices that a true liturgical sense can be developed. As long as the people are only taught to *understand* liturgical symbolism they are making no progress in the cultivation of its spirit. It is only when they are taught to *practise* what this symbolism conveys that they begin to develop the real attitude. For it is not a thing purely in the mind, as a speculative truth, it is a quality or rather an attitude in the whole man, permeating all the faculties of soul and body and giving the whole man a definite orientation. A habit, if you will, yet more than a habit.

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<sup>4</sup> Guardini, *Ibid.* pp. xiii-xiv.

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One of the most elementary things to be grasped is the nature of symbolism. The liturgy is of its very nature symbolic: an act of the virtue of religion manifested in material terms. Therefore symbolism must first of all be explained. But the teaching must not stop there, at the explanation of the meaning; the child must be taught to *use* the symbols. He must be taught not only to understand the Sign of the Cross, but to *make* the Sign of the Cross *with understanding*.

In this respect the mother has a unique power for good over the child. She instructs her child through a power more intimate than that of speech. She is his first stepping stone to all experience, and her word and example have an indelible effect not only on his mind, but upon his whole being in a very deep, and almost unfathomable manner. Thus when she teaches him to make the Sign of the Cross, use holy water and all such actions which are the very rudiments of liturgy, knowing what he is doing, she is forming in him an attitude which takes root in the very depths of his being. From these small and elementary practices of symbolic activity—which is perfect human activity—he will develop a habit of seeing and willing the inner spiritual meaning of all his actions: and this attitude will stand him in good stead when he comes to appreciate more specifically liturgical activities. He will by nature, as it were, attend Mass intelligently, for his first instinct will be to seek out the inner meaning of those externals in which he participates at the Holy Sacrifice. When he is presented with the theological principles which are the source of the liturgy he will be prepared to accept them as things to be carried out. They will appear not just as interesting speculations, but as principles whose very nature it is, when understood, to be put into practice: truths to be grasped not for their own sake but for the sake of the life they stimulate. His first concern will be to grasp this essential character of the liturgy as it is rooted in its theological principles, and other secondary elements will enter into it only in so far as they serve any useful purpose in the development of that character.

And this is the precise function of such elements in litur-

gical study. The science of the language, music, art or history of the liturgy is only doing its duty when it is ministering to the needs of that inner spirit which is the life-force of the liturgy. Such things cannot of themselves produce a liturgical spirit—rather vice versa: given the knowledge and practice of liturgical elements such as the Sign of the Cross; then the development and application of this in the light of the theological principles underlying all liturgical action; then, and only then, the student may find a knowledge of the art or the music of the liturgy helpful in understanding the meaning of the externals: all of which only have significance from the spirit vivifying them.

One thing is quite clear: such knowledge cannot help in the development of a liturgical spirit unless that spirit is already there, and to set about cultivating it by the study of Latin or Plainsong is putting the cart before the horse. The only way to start is with the very rudiments of liturgy. Learn to make the Sign of the Cross with full understanding and deliberation: to use holy water, to kneel down, to join the hands, all in this way: from these elementary habits to come to the more perfect spirit by a knowledge and use of the theological principles guiding liturgical worship.

But what of the man who does not start by learning to make the Sign of the Cross at his mother's knee? Has he no other way? Indeed he has. Yet whether he starts this way, or in later life makes an effort to school himself in the liturgical attitude, he must still start with the most elementary things, and put them into practice. He must begin and progress in exactly the same way—always learning with a view to putting into effect: continually performing these actions intelligently and deliberately, and by this continuous *doing* creating in himself an attitude which while it is most perfectly fulfilled in the Mass and liturgy, has a profound effect on his whole life.

The liturgical apostolate too will only achieve its purpose when its teaching has *doing* as its object. No amount of liturgical texts and historical research will of themselves create a liturgical spirit. This can come only by practice, and it will be the function of the liturgical apostolate first

and foremost to devise ways and means of putting into practice the theology it teaches. We have seen one example suggested by Madame Montessori, but there are many others such as the dialogue Mass, congregational singing of the Mass, and the rest. These will be of value only when the faithful know what they are doing when they take part in them. And they do not learn what they are doing merely by learning to sing accurately. The success of a sung Mass does not depend first and foremost on the quality of voice and musical technique—that has its place—but upon the realization by the singers of their *real* participation in the Holy Sacrifice, which is expressed by their joining in the words.

So long as liturgical movements are only concerned with perfecting the art forms of their singing or their Latin they are a blank failure. Such forms are but the expression of the inner spirit, and it is meaningless to impose them without first attending to the spirit which should give them life. The liturgical advocate must be concerned first of all to teach his followers to act intelligently as opposed to dumb show: he must begin with the Sign of the Cross and teach them to make it well because it expresses a profound spiritual truth. While he gives due consideration to the perfection of their medium of expression, be it Plainchant or Latin, he is to insist that it only has any value in so far as it truly expresses the inner spirit. There must certainly be an effort to sing Plainchant well, not for its own sake, but because it expresses in material terms a spiritual action, an act in the virtue of religion.

Until some such perspective is realized in liturgical matters all efforts at restoration will be in vain. All attempts to restore the Chant, to return to liturgical forms of devotion, will be without foundation unless they are recognized as springing from the inner spirit. If they are merely imposed on the laity without making clear their *raison d'être*, and so forming the spirit which gives them life, they can have no roots and will wither and die. Plainchant or rubrics done precisely for their own sake can never become part of the Christian life.

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