

LOSING THE SACRED: RITUAL, MODERNITY AND LITURGICAL REFORM by David Torevell *T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000. Pp. xiv + 236, £24.95 pbk.*

It is steadily becoming more widely acknowledged that the liturgical reform that followed the Second Vatican Council has generated serious and lasting problems for the Church. David Torevell's study asks why things have gone so badly wrong. He accepts the view, advanced by Fr Aidan Nichols in his *Looking at the Liturgy* (1996), that the rationalism of the Enlightenment engendered an atmosphere hostile to ritual which infected our liturgical reformers. He then looks further back to Descartes, as the one who, with his *cogito ergo sum*, taught us to undervalue our bodies, and consequently the use we make of them in ritual.

From this standpoint he criticizes Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, in particular its central ideal of 'full, conscious and active participation' in the liturgy on the part of the faithful. This, he says, 'had the effect of marginalising the complex and ambiguous dynamic of liturgical symbolism, which always defies cognitive classification.' Here I part company with Torevell.

The Liturgical Movement that led up to the Council was in part an attempt to recover a pre-Cartesian mode of participation in the liturgy. The introduction to the Paschal Vigil in the current Roman Rite expresses this ideal well: 'The Church invites her children...to keep watch and pray. If we thus recall the Passover of the Lord by listening to his word and celebrating his mysteries, we shall have the hope of sharing in (*participandi*) his triumph over death.' Liturgical participation as here envisaged is bodily as well as mental, involving processions, carrying candles, being splashed, perhaps struggling with drowsiness. Nor does it cease when the liturgy is over, but retains its demands and its promises to the grave and beyond. That was what the reformers wanted, but it was not enough to produce new books, vernacularise their texts, and turn the altar round. A change of mentality was called for, and our world was largely deaf to the call. Torevell sketches some of the reasons for this, but I think there are others.

If Descartes must bear some of the blame, some also attaches to John Logie Baird and Bill Gates. We see the world more and more through a screen. Ronald Knox's *The Mass in Slow Motion* already witnesses to this when published in the 1950s, as the cinematic metaphor in its title implies. Though such a title would be inappropriate for a book on today's rite of Mass, many worshippers still come to church as spectators.

Deeper and older forces, too, contribute to our predicament. Most of us would like to know the price we have to pay for God's favour, and would like the church to tell us what it is. So we are drawn to the liturgy, hoping that when we have done what we must, we have done enough. The rites threaten us by beckoning us in further than we dare go. Liturgical catechesis must address not only the Cartesian, but also the Pelagian in all of us.

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