The field of tension between liturgical restoration and reform

Gerard Lukken

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a movement that would have far-reaching consequences for the Christian ritual. In Christian churches, and especially in the Catholic Church, there was a growing awareness of the unique place of the liturgy and of the fact that it had degenerated into a *mysterium depopulatum*, a ritual in which the congregation hardly participated. Liturgy had become the exclusive affair of the priest, leaving no room for believers to contribute: they were only passive spectators, mere consumers of the ritual. This Liturgical Movement gradually grew into a widespread Church faction which, in the middle of the 1940s and 1950s, also had an important influence on the centre of the Church. Under Pius XII, the first tentative revisions in the liturgical books were made.

1. Second Vatican Council: comprehensive reform of the liturgy

In 1959, shortly after his election, Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council. Without any doubt this Council was a breakthrough: the focus was now on a comprehensive reform and an *aggiornamento* of the Christian ritual. At the same time, it was also a culmination of what had been set in motion by the Liturgical Movement with the support of extensive research from the field of liturgical studies. It was for a good reason that the *Constitution on the sacred liturgy* was the first document, issued by the Second Vatican Council: the time was more than ripe for it. The document was approved in 1963 by an overwhelming majority, with just four votes against.

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In a nutshell, the principal characteristics of the reform were the following:

Liturgy is not solely the work of the office holders, but fundamentally belongs to all those who believe; they are all active participants in the ritual. It is not the priest’s private celebration of Mass that should be its basic form, but the communal celebration of the Eucharist. This applies to all Christian rituals, from birth to death. There are various liturgical services and, in principle, there is a division of roles. Accessibility and participation can be enhanced by the use of the vernacular, simplification of rites, and by granting a measure of autonomy to bishops’ conferences.

An extremely important point is the rediscovery of the value of the Scripture and the Word in all parts of the liturgy. The Liturgy of the Word as such is expressly considered a liturgy in its own right. In carefully chosen words the Constitution also opens the door to a decentralization of the liturgy and its adaptation to different countries and cultures, provided that the authentic Roman tradition is preserved. All official liturgical books will need to be revised in the spirit of the Constitution.

The implementation of the Constitution on the sacred liturgy was entrusted to the post-conciliar Commission for the Liturgical Reform, led by Cardinal Lercaro and with Annibale Bugnini as its secretary, and at a later stage to the Congregation for Divine Worship. They approached the reforms energetically, with the support of liturgical and pastoral experts from all over the world. In just over ten years practically all books of the Roman liturgy were revised. These were published as standard editions in Latin by Rome, and translated and adapted in the different countries within the limits set by Rome. Much progress was made in a short time, and the renewal was widely welcomed by those at the base of the Church.

2. From 1975: stagnation of the reform and increasing restoration

However, from the beginning the reform was accompanied by serious tensions. On the one hand, there were some Curia bodies that did not want to relinquish control. Also, a small minority wanted to maintain the status quo and found support within the Curia for their opposition. Detailed information on this can be found in Piero Marini’s book A challenging reform. On the other hand, the

need for further-reaching inculturation pushed the advocates of renewal at the grassroots level to sometimes run ahead of things. This tension was there from the start, particularly in our country; I witnessed it from close by.

The post-conciliar commission showed itself open to these developments. Bugnini visited our country several times, and intensive deliberations took place in Rome as well. But this openness also meant that Bugnini’s opponents, and, increasingly, the traditional Curia bodies, started to regard him with suspicion. In fact, a battle of ideologies soon broke out between those who wanted to consistently implement the Council’s reforms, and those who rather wanted to put the brake on the process. Pope Paul VI eventually opted for a conservative line, also regarding the liturgy. The Congregation for Divine Worship was accused of causing a rift in the Church. According to the Curia, the Congregation was too tolerant with regard to the question of translations and new Eucharistic prayers, and in allowing communion in the hand. It was probably the issue of adding new Eucharistic prayers – in which the Netherlands played an important role – that made tensions reach boiling point. Ultimately, Bugnini’s courage was not rewarded and Paul VI gave in.

In 1975, Bugnini and his direct collaborators were dismissed, the staff was downsized and much expertise was lost. Financial resources were also reduced to a minimum. ‘What direction will liturgy take now?’, was the desperate question asked in liturgical circles. In 1973, Bugnini had already put inculturation on the agenda as an urgent item for the ‘next ten years’. In 1974 he referred to this as the phase of the ‘incarnation’ of the Roman form of the liturgy into the customs and mentality of each individual church. Unfortunately, nothing ever came of such a further aggiornamento. On the contrary, with Bugnini’s discharge a period of stagnation set in, followed by an increase in the support for restoration rather than reform.


5 For the details, see G. LUKKEN: ‘De oorspronkelijke toonzetting van de liturgievernieuwing. Leven en werk van Annibale Bugnini (1912-1982)’, in M. HOONDERT, I. DE LOOS, P. POST & L. VAN TONGEREN (red.): Door mensen gezongen. Liturgische muziek in portretten (= Meander 7) (Kampen 2005) 234-256.

6 For literature, see BUGNINI: Die Liturgiereform 114.


10 For details, see LUKKEN: Met de rug naar het volk.
3. The Society of Pius X: opposition of an extreme traditionalist movement

Earlier I mentioned the opposition emerging after Vatican II from a minority which received support from the Curia. This opposition had actually already started during the Council. It originated with Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the Vatican’s Latin expert, Cardinal Bacci. They signaled a break with the Council of Trent. Soon after, in 1964, the association *Una voce* was founded, which opposed any type of reform; in its wake all sorts of other radical groups under many different names sprang up.11 The ‘Society of Pius X’, which under the leadership of the French (mission) Bishop Marcel Lefebvre (1905-1991) was to break with Rome, was a continuation of this development.12 Lefebvre belonged to the group of French Catholics that saw religion, State and society as one inseparable whole. In the spirit of Pope Pius X (1903-1914), they challenged the so-called ‘modernism’ of the beginning of the twentieth century, which explicitly included the dimensions of human experience and history in theological thinking. More and more, Lefebvre emerged as the leader of a traditionalist movement against Vatican II and its reforms. He was convinced that a modernist conspiracy had taken place there, led by Jews and Freemasons. Especially from 1974 onwards, the old liturgy became a distinguishing mark of the Society of Pius X. In his 1974 *Declaration* Lefebvre characterizes the Tridentine Mass as the ‘eternal’ Mass.13 In France, the Tridentine Mass was openly celebrated at meetings of the National Front party of Le Pen. Tensions led to an overt schism with Rome in 1986.

In order to make sure that his work would be continued, Lefebvre consecrated four bishops without the Vatican’s permission in 1988, when he was 83 years old. One of them was Richard Williamson (born 1940), an Englishman who was later to create quite a stir with his denial of the Holocaust. Lefebvre and his four new bishops were immediately excommunicated. With regard to the Tridentine Rite, Rome had so far only allowed its celebration in exceptional cases through the issuing of so-called indults. But in 1988, the year of the excommunication, permission to celebrate it was substantially extended: the Holy See no

11 *BUGNINI: Die Liturgiereform* 300.
12 See LUKKEN: *Met de rug naar het volk* chapter 1, sub 1.2.
LONGER REQUIRED PRIESTS WHO REJECTED LEFEBVRE’S SCHISM TO FORMALLY AGREE WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF VATICAN II, AND ALLOWED THEM TO CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE THE TRIDENTINE MASS. THIS WAS A FAR-REACHING CONCESSION. \(^{14}\) THE VATICAN CONTINUED ITS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOCIETY OF PIUS X ALSO AFTER 1988, \(^{15}\) AND IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE THEN CARDINAL RATZINGER WAS ALWAYS CLOSELY INVOLVED IN THESE NEGOTIATIONS. HE SHOWED HIS AFFINITY WITH THE TRIDENTINE RITE IN SEVERAL OF HIS PUBLICATIONS, AND CELEBRATED THE TRIDENTINE MASS WITH SYMPATHIZERS A NUMBER OF TIMES.\(^{16}\)

LEFEBVRE’S MOVEMENT CAN BE CHARACTERIZED AS THAT OF THE EXTREME TRADITIONALISTS. THEY REJECT ANY OPENNESS TO MODERNITY ON THE PART OF THE CHURCH, AND WANT TO RETURN TO THE LOST DIVINE ORDER THAT KNOWS NO DUALISM BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE, BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR POWER, AND IN WHICH FAITH AND CHURCH ARE COMPLETELY INTERWOVEN WITH SOCIETY. THIS ORDER THEY SEE, ON THE ONE HAND, AS SUPRA-TEMPORAL; ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY IDENTIFY IT WITH HISTORICAL-POLITICAL CONFIGURATIONS IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY. \(^{17}\) IN THIS CONTEXT THEY SEE THE TRIDENTINE LITURGY AS THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF THE UNCHANGING SYMBOLIC ORDER CREATED BY GOD, IN WHICH CHURCH AND SOCIETY ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED. AS REGARDS THE NUMBER OF UNCOMPROMISING SUPPORTERS OF THE TRIDENTINE MASS, IT IS AN EXTREMELY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF CATHOLICS: NO MORE THAN 0.0008333 PERCENT (LESS THAN A THOUSANDTH OF A PERCENT). \(^{18}\) BUT THIS SMALL GROUP IS SUPPORTED BY TRENDS IN THE POLICIES OF THE ROMAN CURIA AND A NUMBER OF EPISCOPAL CURIAS, WHICH MAKES IT MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN IT DESERVES; ITS FORCE IS ALSO SUPPORTED BY THE GREAT COMBATIVENESS OF MINORITY GROUPS AND CONSERVATIVE MEDIA.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{16}\) For instance in Le Barroux in 1988 and 1995. In 1990 he celebrated the Mass of Easter in Wigratzbad, the head office and settlement of an international seminary of the Society of Pius X (see www.fssp.org/de/ratzwig1990.htm [November 26, 2009]) and in 1999 in Weimar he celebrated a pontifical Mass at the annual session of the Society Pro Missa Tridentina (see www.pro-missa-tridentina.org/galerie/galerie_4_2.htm [November 26, 2009]). Via references on the key site www.pro-missa-tridentina.org/index.htm one can find percentages of the Tridentine liturgy in Germany, Switzerland and Austria and also further links with other analogous societies etc. elsewhere.


\(^{18}\) See LUKKEN: *Met de rug naar het volk* Chapter 1, sub 1.4.

\(^{19}\) So in 2009 the Italian Institute for statistic research Doxa, on behalf of the on internet very active defenders of the Tridentine Mass Messainlatino (Italy) and Paix liturgique (France), examined the opinion of the Italians about the ‘old mass’. According to this
4. The neo-traditionalist movement of the ‘Reform of the Reform’ and the Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum

In addition to the extreme traditionalist movement, another movement gradually emerged after Vatican II, namely that of the ‘Reform of the Reform’. Rouwhorst characterizes this movement as belonging to the neo-traditionalists.\(^\text{20}\) They do recognize in part the importance of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, but consider those reforms too radical, and believe that more connection with the past should be sought. From the start the opinion leader of this movement was undoubtedly Cardinal Ratzinger, who was elected Pope Benedict XVI in 2005. This group has also gained more and more influence within the decision-making bodies of the Curia and the bishops, also in our country.

On 22 December 2005, shortly after his election, Benedict XVI addressed the Curia, underlining the unbroken line between Vatican II and the tradition. His message was that it is wrong to emphasize discontinuity, as if Vatican II was a new beginning rather than part of the tradition.\(^\text{21}\) In his speech he also pointed to the importance of continuity in the liturgy. According to Benedict XVI the new liturgy often seemed to be the cause of discontinuity, especially in practice.\(^\text{22}\) Prior to his Declaration he had already criticized the reforms after Vatican II repeatedly and in no uncertain terms, raising a finger in warning at the liturgy professors and the mainstream of liturgical studies. He did not spare Bugnini either in this respect.

examination two thirds of the practicing Catholics in Italy would at least once a month participate in a Tridentine Mass, when this would be possible. And nine millions would at least once a week celebrate an ‘old mass’. One can expect that these groups will use this kind of examination as pressure. Compare: http://blog.messainlatino.it/2009/10/risultati-del sondaggio assolutamente.html (November 18, 2009).


\(^\text{22}\) For Ratzingers view on liturgy, see more extensively: Lukken: Met de rug naar het volk, Chapter 2.
Underlying Benedict’s criticism is his belief that Greek metaphysics is the optimal setting for the Christian message; in fact, he views all subsequent developments that abandon the Hellenistic paradigm as a degeneration into unbelief. Thus, Ratzinger is very pessimistic with regard to contemporary culture, which no longer perceives the reflection of the divine. What is needed is a re-sacralization of the liturgy. Liturgy, in his view, is the sensory mirror of the divine world, transcending our human condition, sacral, God-given, not created. Just as a plant, a living organism, it continually develops and renews itself organically from within, without any discontinuity. In this essentially Platonic and timeless perspective of liturgy, any further developments are seen, as it were, as being outside historical contingency, with its instability and moments of discontinuation with the past, and as withdrawn from the active contribution of people and cultures.23

This is undoubtedly a contestable point of view. Those in favor of the new developments in Vatican II with its aggiornamento point out that the past itself also shows moments of discontinuation. This is already evident from the history of theology as such: think for instance of the condemnation of Galileo, now repealed; of the revision of the theory that all people are descended from Adam and Eve; and of the anti-modernist oath, still firmly held on to by the Society of St. Pius X, but no longer compatible with the teachings of Vatican II. In addition, liturgical studies show that over the centuries one can indeed find substantial contributions from theologians, poets, musicians, masters of ceremony, experts and other specialists in ritual. Councils, monastic orders and committees have also been responsible for contributions and interventions, of a sometimes revolutionary nature. Also, discontinuations often come to light with the publication of new books, which usually start with the comment that they signal a revision.24 And in ritual studies, too, it is assumed on the one hand


that rituals sometimes develop and grow without any intervention, but on the other hand the contribution of ritual experts is also recognized.\textsuperscript{25} There is certainly more to liturgy than the anonymous organic growth suggested by Benedict XVI.

In 2007, Benedict XVI issued the \textit{Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum}, by no means an innocuous document.\textsuperscript{26} This decree affects the essence of the whole post-conciliar liturgical reform: all books from before Vatican II are again allowed, as ‘extraordinary form’. As was to be expected, the document elicited many protests, particularly from within the mainstream of liturgical studies and from countries such as Germany, France and Switzerland, which had been confronted head-on with the ideas of the Society of St. Pius X. According to the \textit{Motu Proprio}, the reintroduction of the Tridentine liturgy as ‘extraordinary form’ means that from now on there are two forms within one and the same rite. The same rite? This may be the case when viewed from a purely speculative and abstract theological perspective, but certainly not from an empirical point of view and in liturgical or ritual terms. There are definitely two different forms of \textit{lex orandi}, which cannot be easily reconciled. Benedict’s radical intervention strikes at the base of the Second Vatican Council and threatens to discredit the Council’s first document, the \textit{Constitution on the sacred liturgy}, and its implementation. The \textit{Motu Proprio} undoubtedly adds to the tensions and polarizations within the field of liturgy, these days also referred to as a ‘battlefield’.\textsuperscript{27} This

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\textsuperscript{26} BENEDICTUS XVI: \textit{Litterae Apostolorum motu proprio datae Summorum Pontificum} (July 7, 2007); IDEM: \textit{Epistola ad Episcopos ad producendas Litteras Apostolicas motu proprio datas, de usu Liturgiae Romanae instaurationi anni 1970 praecedentis} (July 7, 2007).

battlefield is now the arena for the restorative movements of the extreme traditionalists and the neo-traditionalists with their own theological premises.

Besides these, there is the large influx of those who – in varying degrees – support the aggiornamento of Vatican II and wish to continue in Bugnini’s footsteps, with an open mind to contemporary culture and the pluriform contributions of the local churches and communities. This influx, too, covers a number of specific theological choices. 28

5. Instead of battle preference for a dialogue about the tension between a bottom-up and top-down approach

For the discussion of those theological choices I prefer an open dialogue to a battle, but with the restriction that no concessions are made with respect to the principles of Vatican II – which are precisely those called in question by the Society of St. Pius X. In my opinion, it is essential that this dialogue starts from the theological premise that liturgy is always about sensory rituals that occur in the tension field of mediated transcendence. These rituals are not eternal, but are always interwoven with history and culture. The traditionalists erroneously speak of the time-determined Tridentine form of the liturgy as the ‘eternal’ liturgy. The question is whether the neo-traditionalists do not over-sacralize the form of the liturgy as well. Do advocates of the ‘Reform of the Reform’ not have a too divine view of its form?

On this subject John Baldovin correctly observes that we always have to ask ourselves what it is that we venerate and worship: the liturgy, or the God that it


28 The tensions also refer to psychological dimensions that can be clarified from the ritual studies. There is the fact that rituals seem more reliable, as they are older. Hence the concern to conserve the form of the rituals in exquisite detail and regulated by refined rules (ANGENENDT: Liturgik und Historik 186-190; IDEM: ‘Wie im Anfang, so in Ewigkeit?’ 122-123). But on the other hand there is the fact that rituals, as soon as they are celebrated with heart and soul, and thus subjectivity enters, should also express the sincere heart of man. Then rituals will change. This is a known tension. Moreover, the perception of the invariability of rituals can be connected with the search for security and stability, especially in difficult circumstances and uncertain times. The more threatening the life or culture is, the more one looks for a stable ritual (ANGENENDT: Liturgik und Historik 186-188). Then to some it is of little importance weather these rituals are inculturated or comprehensible. They are in search of a sacred supernatural atmosphere. But this transcendent atmosphere, pleaded by the movement of the ‘Reform of the Reform’, may also be reflected in the new liturgy as such. In that liturgy pluralism certainly is possible.
focuses on. The form of liturgy, however divine and God-given, is incarnated in history. It is not like a static whole that exists completely outside history. The dialogue should be about the tension between the bottom-up or top-down approaches, between transascendence and transdescentence, which each can have different accents. In our culture, however, we look for and discover the transcendent divine world rather from the bottom up, in a transascendent way starting from God’s immanence, and discovered as that which transcends us, and as a fullness that comes to us and is received by us. That is why, in agreement with Vatican II, the advocates of aggiornamento emphasize a bottom-up approach to liturgy, associated with a similar bottom-up Christology, ecclesiology and view of holy office, and embedded in contemporary culture and the dynamics of history.

The advocates of aggiornamento are looking for a liturgical form which is accessible and credible, and which can be experienced by a contemporary audience. This bottom-up approach undoubtedly makes us also more responsive to the pluriform possibilities of the Christian ritual in our culture. Such a contemporary empirical ritual form by no means needs to be at the expense of its Christian identity. On the contrary, it is precisely in this inculturated liturgy that the ritual can be celebrated as a saturated phenomenon, that – according to the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion – is ‘saturated’ with ‘givenness’, comes from elsewhere, is irreducible, and precedes us. In this phenomenon an abundant and empathetic ‘other side’, oriented towards us, is revealed, and ultimately

a personal God, even the God of the Christian tradition, whose love precedes us.\textsuperscript{32}

Some will prefer to take the transcendent road and this is a legitimate choice. But they should be mindful of the tension with the anthropological basis of the liturgy. That basis, with all its resulting contingencies, cannot be excluded. God and man do not have to compete, not in any culture, and that includes our own. Time and again, it is a question of ‘keeping on top’ of the tension between the Jenseits and the Diesseits that occurs within the sensory immanence, both as regards ritual in general and the specific Christian ritual.\textsuperscript{33} And in the dialogue it remains important to emphasize that the transcendent way seems to be more in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II.

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