

THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

ON NOVEMBER 30, 1947, Pope Pius XII issued his encyclical letter entitled *Mediator Dei*. Since that day, volumes of scholarly works have appeared on the liturgy, lay participation, the sacraments, the Divine Office and so on down the entire framework of the liturgical litany. Basically this encyclical of the late Holy Father teaches the principles of a liturgical theology. It was, and still is, a plea for the full realization of the profound depths of the liturgy. These principles encouraging active liturgical participation are actually the basic solution of a searching problem. What is this theological foundation for personal sharing in the worship-life of the Church?

The principles that will be used in the solution of this problem will arise from a three fold consideration: a general discussion of the virtue of religion with its internal and external acts; an indication of the universal plan of Christianity whereby man is configured to the Image of his Maker, and finally, a concretizing of this configuration through the definite medium of the Sacraments and their role in individual worship of God.

In *Mediator Dei*, we find the following truths: "The fundamental duty of man is certainly that of orientating himself and his life toward God. Now man is rightly ordered toward God when he recognizes His Supreme majesty . . . turning all his actions and his powers toward Him . . . in a word, through the virtue of religion whereby he gives the One True God due worship and service." Therefore, the basic resolution of our liturgical question will be found in a firm understanding of the nature and acts of this virtue of religion, for religion is a basic need in man, which need finds its perfect realization in the liturgical life.

Through reason man recognizes God's dominion over individual society and over the entire universe: man knows that God is his Creator. Along with this notion of Creator, are the consequent ideas that as Creator God had made man for Himself and therefore He is man's final destiny. Recognizing this profound gift of his very creation, man must pay the Creator His due. Of course, this can never be paid in full since there is an infinite sepa-

ration between the favors He has given man and the paltry attempts man tries to make in repayment. Man must, however, give all to God that he possibly can. Religion, therefore, is that virtue whereby we give God the service and honor which are due to Him. And in the Christian Dispensation this means a complete self-donation. Man is now placed in his rightful order in the universe; he worships his God-Creator.

This virtue of religion cannot be void of all human influence. It is not a grand passivity, a mere impersonal awareness, but rather it is dynamic, alive, divinely human. Man is not a pure spirit; he is body and soul. From material impressions upon this joined corporeal nature man receives the first seeds of his future knowledge, and it is through external actions that his internal thoughts and desires are made manifest. In the virtue of religion, the internal conviction of God's Greatness and Majesty gives rise to certain external manifestations such as the genuflection, inclinations, vocal prayers, sung hymns. And nothing is more beautiful in the divine Wisdom than the fact that man's body assists him in attaining the heights of true contemplation. Just as a man shows his love for a woman from the way he looks at her and speaks to her or by the things that he gives her, so also when we love God and wish to honor and serve Him, our interior enthusiasm breaks forth in corporeal worship.

But important as they are in themselves, the merely external motions remain a secondary feature of the act of religion. And these—along with stained-glass windows, statues, well trained choirs, vestments, organ music, the very church building itself—never take the place of the internal activity which is the essential and prime notion of worship.

And just as church architecture is the supreme expression of man's recognized subjection to God and just as the church building itself must rest on solid foundations if it is to endure, so also the virtue of religion rests on a solid base of faith and meditation expressed in the interior act of religion, devotion, whereby we have a readiness to give all in the worship of God. The devout man will recognize his dependence on God and will consequently praise and thank Him. And being conscious of the total make-up of his human constitution in both its internal and external aspects, this devout man will instinctively offer worship to God in those ways which flow from the internal act of devotion, the taking of vows and oaths, adoration, sacrifice. Thus is the divine Majesty and Harmony evident in this beautiful virtue of religion.

We have said that man is composed of body and soul. But there is something more; he is made to the image and likeness of God—a simple statement familiar to most of us from the days of our childhood, when we first learned it in the catechism. Yet how very important it is to any discussion of liturgical participation. For the secret of Christianity—effective Christianity—consists in the fact that this God-life, which we call image and likeness, becomes more and more operative in man's daily activity. God-like in our being because He has given us the powers of intellect and will, we become God-like in our activity through liturgical participation.

Man has been singled out in this image-conformity, called to something higher, something above his nature—the supernatural. God Himself has invited him to share in His divine Goodness. Man, with all the weakness of a tainted nature, marked with an interminable record of past failures, undeserving by reason of countless infidelities, has been exalted to the very happiness, divine happiness, that is natural to God. Therefore, this concept of image gives supreme value to man's life. And if it is to be perfectly realized man must enjoy and share in divine activity, which activity presupposes a sharing in the divine Life itself. This is precisely what happens through grace. By the power of grace we have a created participation in the divine Nature. All our thoughts, words and actions are vitalized by Vitality itself. We are lifted up from common dust and find ourselves on an exalted road which culminates in the Beatific Vision.

But what does this mean to us in the practical order? Quite simply, it means the sacraments. We know as a dogma of our faith that Christ instituted all seven of the sacraments. We know from the catechism what a sacrament is; how often have we repeated the catechism's definition from our Sunday School days: "A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." But what does this mean? Most fundamentally, as Saint Thomas indicates in his tract on the sacraments, a sacrament is the sign of a holy thing which perfectly sanctifies man. Sacraments therefore may be considered as symbols and as causes of grace since man's sanctification depends on grace.

As a symbol, a sacrament signifies a holy thing. This symbolism has a threefold temporal reference—to the past, the present and the future. How well this temporal representation is expressed in the beautiful Eucharistic prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas:

O Holy Banquet,
 in which Christ is received;
 in which the memory of His Passion (past)
 is renewed,
 in which the soul is filled with grace, (present)
 and a pledge of future glory is given us. (future)

The sacraments of the New Law are signs of Christ's Passion because they explicitly, immediately and essentially signify His Passion. But also they symbolize the grace which is given through their holy reception and they prophesy the future glory which has been won for us by Christ. Christian worship in its very nature, by reason of the humanity of the worshiper, is a worship in symbols. And because of this nature of Christian worship as symbolic, we can see that the sacraments have the central place in the worship-life of the Church. They are symbols of grace manifest to us through common material things and certain accompanying words. Only divine Wisdom sanctifies man with the material realities that surround him in daily life. Only divine Wisdom could have given us these symbols rooted in matter signifying and causing something as profound as grace. The notions that we have discovered in our discussion of the virtue of religion plus the symbolic nature of the sacraments, indicates the perfect adaptability of Christian worship to man's nature. Linked intimately with this doctrine is the fact that man, having fallen from his exalted position, constantly sins in the pursuit of material reality. And God uses this same material reality to raise him to an even more exalted place. But the role of the sacraments is not merely relegated to that of pure symbolism, because they are actually the causes of grace. It is in their role as causes also that they have their place in the worship of the Church.

It is a dogma of faith that the sacraments confer grace which they contain on those who receive them worthily. The Council of Trent states the following:

If any one should say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace to those who place no obstacles in its way—as though they are only external signs of grace or justice received through faith, whereby among men, the believers are distinguished from unbelievers: let him be anathema (Sess. VII, can. 6).

Sacraments cause grace because they are Christ's actions. The chain of sacramental causality, although a mysteriously unified thing, can be understood by us as so many links of a chain. In a perfection of harmony and wisdom, we can trace this descent

of grace from God to us. The furthest link in the chain by which grace touches the soul is Christ. Since the sacraments are actions of Christ, and Christ is God Incarnate, we must of course see them as effects of the union of Christ with God. Through the medium of His glorified Humanity, Christ continues the divine donation of grace by means of His Church and His ministers. Finally, the Church and these ministers working through the sacraments, implant this grace in the souls of individual Christians. We can therefore see that it is really Christ who acts in all the sacraments. It is Christ who forgives our sins in the hour of repentance; Christ who offers the Eucharistic sacrifice; Christ who baptizes with the saving waters of Redemption. But as a conclusion to these notions of sacramental causality, we should note that although the sacraments give grace to those who place no obstacle in their way, this is by no means a license of infallible automation. Mere adherence to ritual procedure does not mechanically produce grace in the recipient. For the individual to receive the ultimate sacramental effect, he must co-operate with the gift being offered and he must co-operate freely.

As we have pointed out—following Saint Thomas—the sacraments are signs of holy things that sanctify man. But—and this is very important, though often overlooked—they have centrality in the symbolic *worship* of the Church, and membership in this Church is constituted most fundamentally by sacramental incorporation. We are members of the Mystical Body of Christ and as members we must fulfill certain duties given to us by God the Head.

Whenever a man is given some special duty or assignment, he is usually given some mark of distinction significant of the task to be accomplished. Whether it be a fireman, air-line hostess, soldier, foot-ball player—all have some special symbolic mark by which we recognize them for what they are in reality. Certainly modern advertising has capitalized on the idea of symbolic representation in order to sell its products. We have said that man comes to God through Christ by worship. Using the rites founded by Christ Himself, man is marked for his particular task and duty of worshipper. In the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, man receives, indelibly imprinted forever on his soul, a mark of deputation for the sublime acts of worship: sacramental character. It is through these signs that man is truly incorporated into the Priesthood of Jesus Christ. Only the three sacraments mentioned confer the character, since these sacra-

ments are either for dispensing or receiving some *new* power in the Christian economy of salvation. This sacramental character, when it is intertwined with the august vitality of the sacrificial liturgy, forms the basis for the entire worship of the Church.

A deeper penetration into sacramental life is certainly in the spotlight of modern theological investigation. One need only scan the abundance of articles and commentaries written after the publication of the Encyclical Letter *Mystici Corporis* of the late Pope Pius XII to be convinced of this statement. The development of the lay apostolate, of secular institutes and of the lay missionary movement have tapped the deep roots of this document for their basic vitality. It seems unrealistic, however, to classify these developments as "modern," "new," "recent." How many times in our own lives do we take the same route day in and day out, pass the same places and see the same people for years, then all of a sudden as if we had put on some kind of mysterious eye-glasses, we see something for the first time—something that was certainly always visible but something we had passed over and failed to see. We had become so accustomed to the scene that we were in reality missing the obvious. This modern sacramental development is nothing more than a deeper and more penetrating look at realities already existing from the time of their institution.

The contemporary emphasis on the priesthood of the laity, on the Mystical Body, on the sacraments and on active participation by the laity can rightly be called a re-discovery, a resurrection. We are the first, however, to admit that the initial work done in these fields has been greatly amplified and supplemented by recent scholarship. One need only to look to the monumental work of *Mystici Corporis* and *Mediator Dei* to be convinced of this fact. This does not, however, detract from the other fact that these doctrinal developments are the result of the work of illustrious predecessors. Contemporary revival of interest in things liturgical and sacramental find their foundation in the monumental and ever new *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas Aquinas. This is especially true in regard to the sacraments. Since the sacraments receive their efficacy from the Incarnate Word, it is logical that the investigation of their nature and operation should follow the tract on the Mystery of the Incarnation. The sacraments are the temporal extension of the Incarnate God. And if one is to understand this divine extension of Christ even down to the daily life of 1960, a Thomistic analysis of sacramental theol-

ogy is a *must* for any intelligent understanding of the Emmanuel
—*God with us.*

The sacraments have been instituted for men but men will not rest until they rest in Him. Therefore, we must have some way of returning these beautiful gifts back to their Author through the medium of worship. We are indeed marked men. Sacraments are for the sanctification of man but also for the worship of his God. By a powerful and intelligent understanding of this *dual sacramental role*, man will certainly lose the characteristics of pride and self-love which are the marks of our age and society. With the worship of God as the beacon light and the sacraments charting his course, man will rise in contemplation and love of His God. The eternal end is sanctity, the pledge of future glory; the earthly end is a majestic panorama of a universal Church united in the worship of its God on a universal table of sacrifice.

—Anselm M. Egan, O.P.