

THEOLOGY BEHIND THE NEW MASS

Recommended reading: *The Problem of the Liturgical Reform*

Also basing this on: Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (1955)

Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite* (1949)

Small error in Principles, large error in conclusions

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Caveat: Thomistic formation is a bit of an obstacle to understanding these theologians

In a reaction against what they see as the “rigidity” of scholastic theology, their focus is on the “mysterious” side of catholic faith

Thomistic theology: examines revelation, uses human reason to organize, make comparisons, etc. to learn what we can – always recognizing that there are certain things we can never understand in this life, there is a mysterious element to our faith (it is supernatural)

Modernist theologians have a disdain for the precision of Thomistic theology

Modern Kantian thought looks with disdain upon a realist philosophy and traditional doctrine.

Idealist philosophies say there is no connection btwn. man’s concepts and reality, thus they render inaccessible any realities that transcend the order of purely sensible phenomena.

The result is Skepticism – I can’t know anything since there is no connection between my thoughts and reality. I can only experience, since only purely sensible phenomena are certainly authentic.

This puts the primary importance on man’s own experience – it is experience alone which puts man into contact with reality.

THEOLOGY OF MYSTERIES ¹

Modernists love this because it lessens the impact of speculative theology, it is all about experience – also in detracting from the clarity of traditional theology it is much more vague

In keeping with Kantian thought, modernists will disdain any speculative knowledge and overemphasize “experience” ²

Maintain that God does not reveal Himself so much in doctrine but rather in experience (since experience is all-important). This is the “Mysterious” element in the Catholic religion: God revealing Himself to His creatures by allowing them to experience His presence/care/love

All this He did historically (story of the O.T, but esp. OLJC)

But there were/are many people who did not live through these historical events – so if experiencing these events is what gives this contact with God, how do we renew these experiences?

Through liturgical rites: Liturgy puts us back into contact with those original historical events, allowing us to experience them for ourselves

¹ “The doctrine of mysteries is perhaps the most fertile theological idea of our century.” – Joseph Ratzinger

² “The notion of ‘mysterion’ seeks to express the character of God’s direct revelation to His servants which is linked to Revelation; this stands in contrast with a philosophical type of knowledge.” (Dom Casel)

Dom Casel coined the term ‘re-presentation’, in the sense of making the actual historical event present once again³

That is in fact what they mean when they use the word “Memorial” in reference to the Mass⁴

The new theology does not like speculative doctrine, it prefers sensible phenomena – thus it does not like intellectual analyzation of a mystery, prefers to study its ‘living’ historical aspect, how it developed.

Historically, Christ instituted the Eucharist in the context of the rite of the old Passover during the paschal meal, thus the Mass must be considered more from this aspect⁵.

Have to consider the Jewish Passover, which was the historical birthplace of the Eucharist, in order to properly understand the Mass⁶ – the Passover was a memorial meal commemorating the revelation of God’s power and care, and more importantly commemorating and ‘re-actualizing’ God’s Covenant with man.

Just like the Jewish memorial ‘made present’ again God’s ancient actions saving the Jews from their oppressors, such that those who partook of it could re-experience them, so the Mass ‘re-presents’ the actions whereby Christ redeemed mankind.

³ “What we have received in the *Paradosis* [living Tradition], we commemorate in the liturgy, and thus make present the mysteries of the deeds which save us.” (Dom Casel)

“The Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery... celebrating the eucharist in which ‘the victory and triumph of his death are again made present.’ (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 6)

“When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present...” (1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church §1364)

“The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, that is, of the work of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, a work made present by the liturgical action” (ibid, 1409)

“Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated.” (ibid, 1104)

⁴ The definition of the Mass in the 1969 *Institutio Generalis*: “The Lord’s Supper or Mass is the sacred assembly or congregation of the people of God gathering together, with a priest presiding, in order to celebrate the memorial of the Lord.” (§7) Later versions did not change this wording, they only added some phrases to make it less radical.

“[Christ] wished to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection.” (ibid, §2)

⁵ “The celebration of the memory of the Lord and of his redeeming Passion in the course of a sacred meal provided the original, fundamental grounds [for the eucharistic celebration]. The meal aspect is foremost at the beginning. It was not just any meal. It was a sacred meal, sanctified not only by the memory it recalled and made sacramentally present, but also by the prayer which was added to the memorial and which raised it up to God.” – (Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite*)

⁶ *The reasoning we have just set forth* [that of Lietzmann who opposes a Judaic and a Roman Pauline influence, saying that the current idea of the Eucharist comes entirely from Paul] puts the emphasis on the “do this [in memory of Me]” as if Jesus was seen as really creating a new rite and imposing it on a community still entirely in the future. But we must frankly say that such a notion is completely mistaken. Recent scholarship [that of Gregory Dix – an Anglican] shows with perfect clarity that, far from creating a new rite, Jesus was only performing once again a thoroughly traditional rite of Judaism, while infusing into it a new meaning and a new reality. (Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety*)

The key to explaining the mystery of the Mass is no longer the Cross but the Last Supper, which has become the model for the rite when considered as a memorial meal.

Sacrificial aspect of the Mass is never denied, rather the memorial aspect is emphasized and brought to the foreground. The Mass is firstly a memorial, it is only a sacrifice secondarily, and this not because the Mass is a true ritual sacrifice but because the memorial makes the sacrifice of the Cross present ⁷

In summary: emphasis on experience over doctrine – the liturgy becomes the vehicle of producing such experiences

It is participation in these sensible phenomena that puts man into contact with God more than any speculative doctrine, so participation in the Liturgy becomes paramount, certainly far more important than teaching

When speaking of the Mass as memorial, or commemoration, modern theology uses this term with more of a Protestant meaning (recalling a past action), all the while adding a new connotation: ‘making present’ once again the historical events of our redemption so that they can be ‘re-experienced’

⁷ The 1992 Catechism expresses this idea clearly:

“The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body... In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real... Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice... The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial...” (§1362-66)