

INTERNATIONAL LITURGICAL CONFERENCE

FOTA, CO. CORK, 12th July 2008-07-14

PRESS RELEASE

Last Saturday, a well-attended, International Liturgical Conference was held in the Sheraton Hotel Fota, Co. Cork, devoted to the topic: “Benedict XVI and the Sacred Liturgy”. It was the second such conference. The first was held in Columbus, Ohio last September. The third will be held in Budapest next August. These conferences explore the unexpected phenomenon of what is being called the “Benedictine reform” of the Liturgy – sometimes called the reform of the reform. The starting point for all the papers was the frank recognition that to date the reform of the Sacred Liturgy (i.e. the way we celebrate the sacraments, in particular the Mass) ordered by the Second Vatican Council has been, to put it mildly, a mess. It is in urgent need of correction, a standpoint, it is claimed, which is shared by the Holy Father.

The Conference was chaired by **Dr D. Vincent Twomey, SVD**, Professor Emeritus of Moral Theology, Maynooth, a former doctoral student of the then Joseph Ratzinger. In his introductory comments, Fr Twomey singled out Ratzinger’s theology of creation to highlight two central concerns to be found in the Pope’s extensive writings on liturgy, namely (1) the cosmic dimension of the liturgy and (2) the roots of the ritual of the Mass not only in the Word-liturgy of the Synagogue but also in the Temple worship now transformed in Christ. In the bungled reform of the liturgy after the Council, he claimed, both – the cosmic dimension of the liturgy as well as its roots in the Temple worship – were, for various reasons, practically ignored. The result is a truncated liturgy. Fr Twomey also pointed out that in Ratzinger’s sacramental theology and in his theology of the world religions, we find a profound appreciation of the fact that the ultimate roots of Christian sacred liturgy are to be found in the cultic rituals of humanity which reach back to the dawn of time. All of this has been ignored by the so-called liturgical experts who, for the first time in the history of the Church – indeed in the history of religions – began to fabricate the liturgy according to abstract principles of questionable theological provenance. These themes were taken up by the impressive paper of international speakers.

The way we now speak only of “the liturgy” and no longer of “the Sacred Liturgy” well illustrates one of the main reasons why the reformed liturgy up to now has, on the whole, been a catastrophe: it increasingly lacks any reference to the Sacred or to Transcendence. **James Hitchcock**, Professor of History at St Louis University, USA, described the way the reform went wrong, primarily because of the way the secular assumptions of modernity became the determining factors in shaping the liturgy. Thus, for example, the object of the new type of secularized liturgy, it would seem, is to help people relax. Sacred space gives way to domesticated space, where people are supposed to feel “at home”. The community

ends up celebrating itself. The reformers, unfortunately, ignored the findings of anthropologists such as Mary Douglas, who recovered for us moderns the nature and centrality of symbol and ritual –and with ritual, the centrality of tradition in forming community, a community that reaches beyond the here-and-now to God, the angels and the saints in glory. In a word, the reformers fell prey to the spirit of the age.

The internationally renowned English theologian and author, **Dr Alcuin Read**, described in some detail the major steps in the reform since the council. The original vision of the Council Fathers got lost in the hands of the so-called “liturgical experts”, who, for the first time in the history of the Church began to fabricate liturgy in the abstract, as it were, instead of letting it organically develop. Central to the concern of the “liturgist” was the hermeneutics of discontinuity, as though all that had happened over the previous centuries had been a mistake and so something new had to be produced. Dr Read also outlined what he described as the four pillars of the “Benedictine Reform”, namely the Pope’s personal liturgical example, his insistence on historical and intellectual honesty with regard to the liturgical life of the Church in recent decades, his insistence on the correct celebration of the liturgy according to the liturgical books, and his desire for fidelity to received liturgical tradition. Central to this is the affirmation of the hermeneutics of continuity, expressed, for example, in the general permission to allow the pre-Vatican II rite (the so-called Tridentine Rite) to be celebrated and calling it the extraordinary rite.

The validity of the ordinary rite – the Novus Ordo of Pope Paul VI – was stressed in the lively paper delivered by Mrs Hitchcock on the main features of the Benedictine Reform. Two extremes are to be avoided: rejecting the validity of either the old rite or the new. Both are expressions of the one, ancient liturgical tradition of the Latin Western Tradition. It is hoped that both will in time influence each other, since the older rite is itself in need of further development, e.g. the use of the vernacular in the readings, as already foreseen by the Pope’s decree authorizing the use of the older rite. But the main attention must be given to the celebration of the new or ordinary rite and the need to recover the cosmic dimension of the sacred liturgy, which Pope Benedict XVI has stressed over and over again.

A fascinating paper by the German theologian, **Manfred Hauke**, Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Lugano, Switzerland, introduced the participants to the life and work of the little-known liturgist, Klaus Gamber of Regensburg. Ratzinger once described him as the only scholar who truly represents the central tradition of the Church in matters liturgical. Professor Hauke described Gamber as the father of a new beginning in liturgical reform.

The reform of the rite at present currently in use must, for example, pay more attention to the sacred nature of the liturgy. In his learned paper, **Dr Uwe Michael Lang**, a German Oratorian priest and renowned patristic scholar now working the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, discussed “Sacred Art in the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger”. The Pope is acutely aware that the contemporary crisis in art is a symptom of modernity’s crisis of identity, with the result that art today is neither refreshing nor inspiring. This is because modernity denies the transcendental nature of beauty, the identity of beauty with truth and goodness. This has had a profound influence on the art and architecture found in our churches. The heresy of iconoclasm (the destruction of

images) thus returned with a vengeance. Statues and images were removed from churches and often destroyed. They were sometimes replaced by abstract art that simply confuses. One contributor commented that many modern churches have all the attraction of a fridge. Ratzinger once said, in effect, that the complete absence of images is not a Christian option. However, the romantic but basically modernist solution of A.W. Pugin, who recognized only the mediaeval art as truly Christian was also criticized, as it had been by Newman in his own day. The Pope calls for a truly creative sacred art that is at the same time contemporary and creative of something entirely new.

The Canadian editor of the periodical, *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal*, **Dr Neil J. Roy** read a scholarly paper on the richness of the Roman Canon, its internal order and beauty. He paid special attention to the lists of saints mentioned before and after the Consecration, showing how there was nothing arbitrary about the composition of the lists. The saints mentioned there cover the entire spectrum of saints and are arranged under two "headings", as it were, that of Our Lady on the one hand and St John the Baptist on the other, two saints who are depicted in sacred art both in the East and in the West as petitioning Our Lord on behalf of sinners.

The guest of honour and keynote speaker at the conference was the Argentinean Archbishop, **Jorge Maria Cardinal Mejia**. His opening address was on the problem of translation. Pointing out that translation was a consequence of sin, he outlined the biblical understanding of the origin of languages in the original sin that led to the Tower of Babel, punishment for which was the origin of the various languages of the world. Scripture also points to the healing that came with Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit which enable humanity to communicate with a common language once again, that of the faith. His scholarly discourse on the various translations of the Bible illuminated the significance and the limits to all attempts at translation. Cardinal Mejia also presided over and preached at the concelebrated Mass according to the new rite (the Novus Ordo of Paul VI) in Latin in the magnificent Cobh Cathedral. The Lassus Scholars choir of Dublin provided the music of Palestrina for the Mass. Their singing was as close to perfection as is possible, remarked the Cardinal at the end of Mass. This solemn Mass demonstrated that the new rite, when properly celebrated, can also be magnificent. It also can effect that "sursum corda", that raising of our hearts to God, the angels and the saints in communal worship, which is the object of authentic sacred liturgy.