

LITURGY, MODERNITY, AND IDEOLOGY Reflections on Similarities and Differences between Trent and Vatican II

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One often hears that the Roman Catholic Church only opened its windows for the modern world at Vatican II. This is a curious statement, however, for it supposes an understanding of modernity which may be questioned for good reasons. Actually, it means that the Church had missed the boat of contemporary (Western) society for a very long time. At the same time, it implied the hope that the Church would soon adopt a (more) democratic culture, that church-leaders would attach (more) importance to the idea that every baptized person is an equal member of the Church understood as the peregrinating people of God, and that corresponding proposals would be implemented to modify procedures of decision-making in the Church at large. When it comes to the liturgical life of the Church, this position usually favours the active participation of all the faithful in worship services of all kinds, celebrations of the Eucharist, the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours in vernacular languages, and an overall easy access to the Church's ritual and ceremonial repertoire.

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In this paper, I do not want to challenge the pertinence or the value of these ideas in the contemporary context but I do want to challenge the understanding of modernity which often underlies them. In particular, I intend to criticize the assumption that changes in the Church's worship must be made only because of prevailing ideas or shifting sensitivities in society and culture, e.g., under the influence of a set of convictions broadly shared by the majority of people. To build up my argument in an appropriate manner, I first present two interpretations of modernity and thereupon explain the link between modernity and the emergence of ideologies. These preliminary steps will enable me to sharpen the question about the relation between Trent and Vatican II, to briefly discuss the liturgical reforms ensuing from Trent, and to compare them with the ones that followed after Vatican II. Finally, I will conclude with a suggestion for what I think is a more fruitful understanding of the interplay between modernity, liturgy, and ideology.

1. Two Interpretations of Modernity

In an Italian volume on the relation between the Council of Trent and modernization processes in early post-medieval Europe, the German scholar Wolfgang Reinhard draws an interesting distinction between two interpretations of modernity, which he calls 'relative' and 'absolute'.¹ On the one hand, modernity can be understood as an irreversible historical evolution characterized by the emancipation of the individual from traditional, institutional, or ethical authorities above or beyond its reach. Modernity awakens the awareness that these authorities impose themselves probably unjustifiably and proposes correlative discourses of liberation. Reinhard calls this dimension of modernity 'relative'. On the other hand, modernity can also be understood as a specific and complex way of interaction with reality based on an attempt to dominate natural processes, strivings to do that as efficiently as possible, and thereby leading to a diversification of functions, rationalization, and disciplining. This is what Reinhard calls 'absolute'.²

¹Wolfgang Reinhard, "Il concilio di Trento e la modernizzazione della Chiesa. Introduzione," in *Il concilio di Trento e il moderno*, ed., P. Prodi and W. Reinhard (Annali dell'Istituto storico Italo-germanico: 45), Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996, 27-53.

²One may justifiably doubt whether Reinhard's terminology is the best one possible. This is probably not the case, for the concepts "relative" and "absolute" evoke too many philosophical complexities. Nevertheless, I will not replace Reinhard's terms by other ones, because I think they have a not unimportant

Clearly, at Trent, the Roman Catholic Church may not have been modern in the 'relative' sense, but, according to Reinhard, she was definitely modern in the 'absolute' sense. She did not really account for the freedom of individual believers but, instead, set up a quite effective and achievement-oriented system. The post-Tridentine development of the Roman Catholic Church was focused on efficiency and control; the Church wanted to be a system guided by unshakeable principles and a certain interpretation of 'reason'. Moreover, still according to Reinhard, the absolute interpretation of modernity is far more fundamental and influential than the relative one. He thinks that modernity as an encompassing organization is a more sweeping phenomenon than modernity as a discourse about the individual, its preferences, and its rights.

2. Modernity and Ideology

Another important characteristic of modernity is the emergence of ideologies. It seems that attempts at establishing control over reality went along with strong sets of ideas about how to get that control organized. Modernity is not only about a subject proclaiming its own autonomy or about methods of scientific and rational reasoning as the only warrants for truth, but also about a vision and a promise of an almost universal realizability of projects. Many interpretations of modernity stress that the radically new understanding of science which was developed from around the 16th and the 17th century, was progressively combined with technological and economical developments previously unthought-of. Modernity, however, had its roots in a fundamental shift of the way in which human beings interacted with—and understood—the reality surrounding them. It is because of this shift that the changes in science, politics, religion,

advantage, too. Reinhard avoids the notions of pre-modern, post-modern, late-modern, and the like. Although he doesn't explicitly reflect on that choice, I see it as a great advantage that he interprets "modernity" not exclusively, or primarily, as an identifiable historical period. Rather, modernity is a paradigmatic term, which helps one to come to terms with (interpretations of) modernity and modernization in a philosophical way, i.e., without bothering too much about historical questions about when and where it began and (whether at all it already) ended. For the truth may be that, even if we are already in a post-modern situation, there is still a great amount of modernity among and around us. For some background to the distinction between modernity as a historical and as a paradigmatic concept, see my *Revelation, Reason and Reality. Theological Encounters with Jaspers, Schelling and Baader* (Studies in Philosophical Theology: 39), Leuven – Paris – Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007, 7.

society, culture, etc. could arise, not vice versa.³ In the political realm, modernity saw the establishment of nation-states and the corresponding emergence of bureaucracies.⁴ This development is particularly relevant for our topic and is in line with the way in which Reinhard interprets absolute modernity.

The said evolution brought about the proceduralisation of the exchange both between citizens and the state and between citizens among themselves. These citizens increasingly functionalized the world and their relationships, as they became employers/employees and producers/consumers in many different areas of life. An ideology can be understood as the fruit of the reflection about strategies to manage all of these interactions in the most efficient way. In addition to that reflection, however, which is never neutral of course, ideologies contain as well as employ mechanisms of persuasion which naturally try to sidetrack alternatives to their own proposals and ideas. As they are fundamentally directed towards dominion, they lose a sense of openness and a sensitivity for the complexity of reality. Inasmuch as modernity does not take anything for granted and supposes that everything (can and) must be created by the self,⁵ modernity and the emergence of ideologies are necessarily intertwined. Ideologies design the programs of the modern self. And those programs actually originate in a deep mistrust towards being, “[f]or ‘modern’ has always meant: that for which nothing is given, not even itself.”⁶ Yet, if it is true that liturgy can only be understood from a sense of givenness, there cannot but be a fundamental tension between modernity and liturgy.

³For a thoroughgoing interpretation of modernity and its impact on culture and society, reference must be made to the work of Louis Dupré, in particular his *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993 and *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. Dupré convincingly shows that modernity is a very complex phenomenon with many layers. At the same time, still according to Dupré, it is right to speak about ‘modernity’ in general, for it brought about a fundamental shift in human beings’ interaction with reality.

⁴Interestingly, the emergence of modern bureaucracies seems to have preceded the development of democracies. Generally, modern democracies have kept modern bureaucracies to keep the system going.

⁵Fundamental in this respect is Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1989.

⁶Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration. The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, transl. John McKeane (Perspectives in Continental Philosophy), New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 45.

Hence, a fundamental question arises. If modernity goes along with ideologies, if Trent and Vatican II were typically modern councils, and if modernity and liturgy cannot be easily reconciled, how are we to assess the liturgical reforms these two councils brought about? Are they the fruit of mere ideologies, understood as the offspring of 'absolute' modernity? Or are there other factors, aspects, and dimensions that we have to take into account?

3. Post-Tridentine Liturgical Reforms

As a matter of fact, Trent entertained a paradoxical relation with the liturgy. It was above all preoccupied with a theoretical-theological understanding of the sacraments and defended classical doctrines over against what it thought were aberrations in the thinking and writings of representatives of the Reformation. Trent did not deal with the liturgy in an equally profound way as it did in the realm of the theology of the sacraments. In an article published long before he became the secretary of the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*, Annibale Bugnini observed that the term itself is almost completely absent from the council's canons and decrees.⁷ This observation goes beyond the level of the anecdotic and the semantic. For, paraphrasing a famous word of the prominent liturgical theologian and American Benedictine Aidan Kavanagh, for Trent, orthodoxy seemed to denote first and foremost "doctrinal accuracy" and only secondarily "right worship."⁸ In a very apologetic way, Trent stipulated what to think and, even more pointedly, how not to think about the sacraments. Its understanding of liturgy was, all in all, a very superficial one. It is the entirety of the Church's solemn ceremonies to be performed by the class of priests.

A good example of a general assessment of Trent's position towards liturgy is provided by the famous Austrian liturgical scholar and spokesperson of the Liturgical Movement, Josef Andreas Jungmann. He appeals to the general reputation of the council as a 'reform' council⁹ and says that the council actually had a quite

⁷Annibale Bugnini, *La « liturgia » dei sacramenti al concilio di Trento*, in *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 59 (1945) 39-51.

⁸Aidan Kavanagh, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992, 3.

⁹This standard interpretation of the Council of Trent is to a large extent the merit of Hubert Jedin's monumental five-volume study entitled *History of the Council of Trent* (original German version: *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, Freiburg: Herder, 1949-1975).

restricted notion of 'reform', which it above all interpreted as the condemnation and correction of abuses. In addition, the council wanted to restore the liturgy to a more ancient unspoiled model.¹⁰ However, it lacked the knowledge and the means to effectuate that because of the simple fact that historico-liturgical scholarship had not yet come up with a full understanding of the development of the Roman rite in the sixteenth century.¹¹ This implies that what it said was the original form of the liturgy was actually ideological. It was a normative vision which had to be rigorously implemented and that implementation went along with inspection and surveillance.

Because of the emphatic lack of interest in the liturgy qua liturgy, historical scholars have suggested that the most important Tridentine accomplishments pertaining to the liturgy are neither to be situated in what the council fathers said in the documents they produced nor during the council itself, but only afterwards through the popes and the commissions they assigned. In this respect, Nathan Mitchell rightly observes: "Strictly speaking, neither Trent nor Vatican II 'reformed' Roman Catholic worship. Instead, each called for the creation of papally appointed commissions to carry out the task."¹² It seems that the post-Tridentine liturgical reforms are the consequence of drastic changes in the self-organization of the Church, rather than the fruit of a profound reflection of what the liturgy and its church-building potential are.

In addition, these historical scholars consistently mention the establishment of the Sacred Congregation of Rites by pope Sixtus V in

¹⁰Joseph A. Jungmann, "Das Konzil von Trient und die Erneuerung der Liturgie," in Georg Schreiber, Hg., *Das Weltkonzil von Trient. Sein Werden und Wirken*, Freiburg: Herder, 1951, 325-336, 325: "Gerade auf liturgischem Gebiet war die Aufgabe des Konzils die Reform, und zwar Reform in dem engeren Sinn der Beseitigung von Mißbräuchen und der Rückkehr zu einer älteren, von Mißbildungen noch freien 'Form'."

¹¹This point is made, among others, by Martin Klöckener and Angelus Häußling in their commentaries on the bull *Quo primum* promulgating the 1570 missal and on the phenomenon of liturgical reform as a challenge for liturgical studies. Cf. Martin Klöckener, "Die Bulle 'Quo primum' Papst Pius' V vom 14. Juli 1570 zur Promulgation des nachtridentinischen *Missale Romanum*," in *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 48 (2006) 41-51; Angelus Häußling, "Liturgiereform. Materialien zu einem neuen Thema der Liturgiewissenschaft," in *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 31 (1989) 1-32.

¹²Nathan Mitchell says this in the preface to James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship. Trent to Today*, 2nd edition, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003, x.

1588 and the publication of the major liturgical books: the *Breviarium Romanum* in 1568, the *Missale Romanum* in 1570, the *Pontificale Romanum* in 1595-96, and the *Rituale Romanum* in 1614. One could legitimately defend the idea that the whole process which drove these initiatives was ‘absolutely’ modern and no less ideologically motivated. The Church set up a bureaucratic organ which aimed at a doctrinal uniformity and a liturgical standardization of gigantic proportions, employed efficient means to control both of them, and was not willing to give room for spontaneity. In the time span roughly between the end of the 16th and the end of the 19th century, the liturgy and the life of worship and devotion of Roman Catholic faithful had become officialized in a way unparalleled in the entire history of Christianity. Whether this was a truly ‘liturgical’ reform, as one often assumes, is a serious question to which there is no easy answer. But there are good reasons to doubt about it.¹³

4. Post-Vatican II Liturgical Reforms

There are a lot of similarities between the liturgical reforms after Trent and the ones carried out by the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*, which came into being already during the Second Vatican Council.¹⁴ There was a commission especially created with a view to an efficient implementation of what the Council had decided. There was a lot of administration, legalization, and organization involved. Granted, there were experiments but they were always neatly controlled by officials, in a way similar to what scientist do in laboratories. The fact that there was some room for experimentation did not mean that any individual or group of people could now establish its own version of liturgical celebrations and that anything henceforth depended on the creativity and authenticity of those groups and their leaders—which could be in line with ‘relative’ modernity. To the contrary, there was an admirably well organized system of reporting and approving.¹⁵ And, most interestingly, there was a widely shared anxiety for and even a refusal of inner diversity.

¹³In this respect, see in this regard my article “Did the Council of Trent Produce a Liturgical Reform? The Case of the Roman Missal,” in *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 93 (2012) 171-195.

¹⁴Piero Marini, *A Challenging Reform. Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal 1963-1975*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2007.

¹⁵The standard work which chronicles the works of the *Consilium* is Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, transl. Matthew J. O’Connell, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990.

The goal was to carry out the liturgical reforms as quickly and as efficiently as possible, everywhere. That sounds very much like the operational logic of an ideology.

The question is whether these similarities between the post-Vatican II and post-Tridentine liturgical reforms must not be counterbalanced with differences. I think that this is the case, and I also think it is timely and important to stress these differences.¹⁶ Let me elaborate this idea with three arguments, which mutually reinforce one another.

First, the substance and the nature of the liturgy were explicitly addressed by the Second Vatican Council. This was the first council in the entire history of the Church which devoted explicit attention to the liturgy. The liturgy was given due theological, spiritual, and pastoral weight beyond merely theoretical and juridical concerns. When one carefully reads *Sacrosanctum concilium*, it is striking that so much theological and spiritual attention is given to the liturgy. The general guidelines and practical proposals flow forth from a fundamental reflection on the position, the value, and—above all—the immense importance of the liturgy in the life of the Church.¹⁷ One

¹⁶Within the confines of this paper I do not want to engage myself in discussions around the “reform of the reform” movement and the far-reaching criticisms launched against the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms by some rightist opposition groups. For a work which is representative of this current, see László Dobszay, *The Bugnini-Liturgy and the Reform of the Reform*, Front Royal (Virginia): Catholic Church Music Associates, 2003, as well as the second large publication by the same author about the same subject matter, *The Restoration and Organic Development of the Roman Rite* (Studies in Fundamental Liturgy), London: T & T Clark, 2010. In some of the rhetoric involved, Dobszay seems to have difficulties with the “creative will of commissions” (*The Bugnini-Liturgy*, p. 9) which changed the liturgy, because what they did was not in line with the organic development of the liturgy. It remains quite unclear what Dobszay exactly means by this but he somehow understands it as the age-old traditional expression of the way in which God’s people ritually responds to God’s salvific initiative. Dobszay apparently aims at ‘modern’ and ‘secular’ evolutions when he is criticizing the post-Vatican II liturgical renewal, but he never gives a sufficient explanation of how he interprets these concepts. Therefore, it is legitimate not to deal with his ideas in the framework of the present paper. A well-informed and balanced study about these (and other) critiques is John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy. A Response to the Critics*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2008.

¹⁷This reading of the eminent importance of the Council’s theology of the liturgy is in line with Massimo Faggioli’s recent and groundbreaking study: Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform. Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum concilium*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2012. There is little doubt that this book will be one of the most important ones in the coming years, when it comes to celebrating the 50th anniversary

looks in vain for such a robust treatment of the liturgy in Trent's canons and decrees.

Second, this theological approach to liturgy made it possible that the Church redefined itself in its relation to God, his revelation and his covenant, and the community that tries to live up to his command of love. Trent had not interpreted these realities in such a way, at least partially because of the polemical context it saw itself confronted with. Trent felt itself urged to react to a context which it interpreted to be inimical, whereas Vatican II adopted a genuinely ecumenical and much more irenic approach.¹⁸ Moreover, a convincing case has been made that the liturgical and ecumenical dimensions of Vatican II were intrinsically connected, i.e., not two distinct issues with which the council fathers dealt.¹⁹

Third, the program of concrete liturgical reforms was motivated by intrinsic reasons. Vatican II preferred the concept of renewal (*renovatio*) and meant by it a comprehensive conversion of the Church as body of Christ and God's people, much more than the adaptation of rubrics in view of preserving an amalgamate of ritual and textual traditions. The liturgical reform was understood as a motor, not as an accident. If at all Trent produced a liturgical reform, it was rather the result of an ecclesial reorganization both *ad intra* and *ad extra* than the fruit of a reflection about its deepest calling in and for the world.

5. Concluding Observations

The most ardent defenders of the post-Vatican II liturgical reforms have not always clearly distinguished between the theoretical and practical ideals of the Liturgical Movement on the one hand and the profound theological understanding of the liturgy of Vatican II on the other. This explains why there has been a great deal of aggression, frustration, and seemingly unbridgeable misunderstandings in the aftermath. Therefore, I think it is timely and important to patiently

of Vatican II and, more importantly, to interpreting and valuing the liturgical reforms brought about by the Council.

¹⁸Some conservative groups tend to look down on Vatican II's deliberately "pastoral" approach and contrast the pastoral nature of a council with a "dogmatic" one. That such an opposition of these categories is absurd and that the underlying assumption, namely that being "pastoral" would be less important, less valuable, or less legitimate, is bare nonsense, is eloquently demonstrated by Ephrem Carr, "*Sacrosanctum concilium* and its Consequences. The Reform of the Liturgy," in *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 92 (2011) 183-194.

¹⁹Again, this interpretation is in line with Faggioli, *True Reform*.

discern what is ideology and what is theology. To read Trent as a modern council and to realize that Vatican II equally has modern traits can be helpful in that kind of exercise. However, the real challenge fifty years after *Sacrosanctum concilium* may not be to win the battle over the right interpretation of the document but to interiorize the thoroughly theological sense of liturgy it promoted. It is my conviction that such a reading may be instrumental to overcome one-sided interpretations of the constitution and to move beyond the question whether the council embraced modernity or not, and whether that embracement was a good thing or not.