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Benedict XVI and the Eucharist

Eamon Duffy

My brief in this paper is a modest one, to expound the distinctive eucharistic views of Pope Benedict XVI. The pope included two paragraphs on the Eucharist in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*,[1] but otherwise has written nothing about the Eucharist. Joseph Ratzinger the theologian, however, has been much preoccupied by it, and it is to the views of the theologian I want to attend. The preoccupation, we should note, has largely been focussed on the *phenomenon* of eucharistic celebration, both as it is and as it ought to be. Eucharistic themes have been prominent in Ratzinger's work from the start of his career – the epigraph for his dissertation on the people and House of God in Augustine's doctrine of the Church was '*Unus panis unum corpus sumus multi*', and as a young theologian he wrote several articles on formal aspects of eucharistic doctrine such as transubstantiation and eucharistic sacrifice, mostly in an ecumenical context in dialogue with German protestants. I shall, however, be ignoring those early writings, and will focus instead on the more controversial views

[1] *Deus Caritas Est* paras 13 & 14. They are worth citing at length.
13. Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his act of institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (c.f. *Jn 6.31–33)*. The ancient world had dimly perceived that man's real food – what truly nourishes him as man – is ultimately the *Logos*, eternal wisdom: this same *Logos* now truly becomes food for us – as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realised in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental "mysticism", grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.
14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental "mysticism" is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all other communicants. As Saint Paul says, 'Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (*1 Cor* 10.17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become 'one body', completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us.

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of the post-conciliar Ratzinger. As you will all be aware, Ratzinger is uneasy with the direction of change in the post-conciliar liturgy: that unease is often perceived as part of a general rejection on his part of the conciliar reforms, or, to put it more crudely, as part of a more general reactionary repudiation of the Council. I think this does him a grave injustice. Behind his criticisms of the modern liturgy lies a considered and coherent theology and ecclesiology which, even if he were not pope, would merit a proper hearing; since he now occupies the chair of Peter, his views on these issues are a matter of the keenest interest. Since any expositor should lay their own cards on the table, I should probably add at this early point that though I have difficulties with several aspects of the Ratzingerian system I am about to expound, I find myself in fervent agreement with much of the actual substance of his critique of the post-conciliar liturgical reform, and think he is eminently worth hearing on that count alone.

The first thing to register is the extent to which Joseph Ratzinger's views on the liturgy are shaped by his pre-war experience of growing up in small-town Bavaria, and the worship of his parish church. He was the pious son of a pious family. His father, a policeman, was a devout mass-goer, and the child Ratzinger was given a series of bilingual missals by his parents, to help him to understand what was going on at the altar. Pope Benedict has left a vivid account of his own awakening with the help of these books to the beauty and immemorial antiquity of the Mass. He writes,

> It was a riveting adventure to move by degrees into the mysterious world of the liturgy, which was being enacted before us at the altar. It was becoming more and more clear to me that here I was encountering a reality that no one had simply thought up, a reality that no official authority or great individual had created. This mysterious fabric of texts and actions had grown from the faith of the church over the centuries. It bore the whole weight of history within itself, and yet, at the same time, it was much more than the product of human history.[2]

For him, the 'whole weight of history' meant both the history of Christianity over two thousand years and in many cultures, of course, but also, in a very concrete way, the liturgical culture of his own Bavaria. He is a man very much at ease with, even gratefully uncritical of, the communal religion which formed him, because he believes it to have been a healthy and an authentic historical and cultural expression of Catholic Christianity, everything from the musical glory of a Haydn Mass in the gold and white splendour of a southern Baroque church, to the folk-customs of the Bavarian countryside. There is certainly a strong element of nostalgia in all this. Here he is, in a characteristic essay on 'What Corpus Christi means to me', recalling the Corpus Christi processions of his youth. He has been reflecting on St Thomas'

[2] Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones, Memoirs 1927–1977*, San Francisco 1998, p. 19–20.

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aphorism about the service of God, '*Quantum potes aude* – dare to do all that you are able to', and he goes on,

> I can still smell those carpets of flowers and the freshness of the birch trees: I can see all the houses decorated, the banners, the singing; I can still hear the village band which, indeed, sometimes dared to do more, on this occasion, than it was able to! I remember the *joie de vivre* of the local lads, firing their gun salutes.[3]

Ratzinger's gut knowledge that all this had made him what he was, joined with his intellectual conviction that this was authentic catholic Christianity at its best. Together, they make him suspicious of those professional liturgists who, during and after the Council, rejected such celebrations as evidence of a decadent or defective theology of the Eucharist, one which had forgotten that the Eucharist had been instituted to be eaten, not carried about on carpets of flowers or shot into the air over by lads with guns. By contrast, these processions for Ratzinger represented deep tradition, the authentic transmission of Catholic belief in and love for the Eucharist, within a culture shaped by and saturated in loyalty to Catholicism. If such celebrations did not square with the fashionable theology, then it was just too bad for that theology. So he comments,

> when we walk our streets with the Lord on Corpus Christi, we do not need to look anxiously over our shoulders at out theological theories to see if everything is in order and can be accounted for, but we can open ourselves wide to the joy of the redeemed.[4]

Love and gratitude for his own Catholic upbringing was however only one dimension in the formation of his attitudes towards liturgy. Like most theologically engaged Catholics of his generation, Ratzinger was profoundly influenced by the liturgical movement which had become one of the major sources of theological excitement between the wars, and especially by the writings of the Munich-based theologian Romano Guardini, Karl Rahner's predecessor in the chair of Theology and Catholic Weltanschauung or world-view at Munich. In 1918 Guardini published a series of lectures under the title *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. This little book, which had no scholarly bibliography or learned footnotes, became almost at once one of the foundational texts behind the twentieth century liturgical movement. In it Guardini argued that the liturgy was the main vehicle for and expression of the Church's inner essence. Into its words and actions was distilled the deepest convictions and aspirations of the Christian community, so an appreciation of the meaning and methods of the liturgy was the best means of penetrating to the heart of the Church's

[3] *The Feast of Faith*, San Francisco 1986, p. 127ff.
[4] *Ibid.,* pp. 129, 135.

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Gospel. The liturgy was not just the sum total of rules governing the performance of the obligatory worship of God, it was the very heart of what it meant to be a Catholic, a school of wisdom and understanding, in which all the resources of human culture, in words, visual art, architecture and music were deployed into 'the supreme example of an objectively established rule of spiritual life'.[5]

Guardini laid great emphasis on the communal aspects of the liturgy, 'the Liturgy does not say "I", but 'we"'[6] and on its transcendence of the merely local or any particular congregation. In the liturgy, the Christian 'sees himself face to face with God not as an entity, but as a member of the unity' of the Church. The liturgy was the immemorial distillation of Christian experience, so just as it discouraged individualism or the merely local, it also discouraged strong and immediate emotion in favour of restraint. Yet it was never frigid, its texts full of longing, hope, and love for God – 'emotion flows in its depths. . .like the fiery heart of the volcano. The liturgy *is* emotion, but it is emotion under the strictest control'. This universalising restraint, the 'style of the liturgy', in the words of another of Guardini's chapter titles, trained and liberated Christians into wider and deeper feelings than their own, drew them into the universal aspirations of the whole of redeemed humanity, identified them with the Christ whose prayer the liturgy was.

Joseph Ratzinger revered and reveres Guardini. He first read *The Spirit of the Liturgy* shortly after he began his theological training in 1946, and the book was a milestone in his intellectual and religious development. Reflecting on its importance in 2000, he wrote that 'It helped us to rediscover the liturgy in all its hidden beauty, hidden wealth, and time-transcending grandeur, to see it as the animating centre of the Church, the very centre of Christian life. It led to a striving for a celebration of the liturgy that would be "more substantial" [i.e., which would reveal the fundamental substance or structure]. We were now willing to see the liturgy – in its inner demands and form – as the prayer of the Church, a prayer moved and guided by the Holy Spirit himself, in which Christ unceasingly becomes contemporary with us, enters our lives'.[7]

The Liturgical Movement was of course a movement for reform. Driven by a passionate belief that the liturgy preserved the deepest insights and the most fundamental longings of Christianity, Guardini and his colleagues and disciples were also driven by the conviction that in practice the liturgy was often cluttered by the accumulated rubbish of centuries, bogged down in excessive legalism and so no longer able to communicate with modern people. Guardini himself

[5] Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, London 1935, p. 121.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 141.
[7] J.Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, San Francisco 2000, p. 7.

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celebrated so-called "dialogue masses" at an altar facing the people, and using vernacular hymns, in a desire to let the liturgy speak clearly once again. And like many of the brightest minds of his generation, the young Joseph Ratzinger shared this reforming impatience. As a *peritus* at the Council he was to deploy a rhetoric of impatience and disparagement which stressed the problems of a Latin liturgy rather than its glories, designed to speed along liturgical reform. So, before the Council the same Ratzinger who had written time and again of his deep and nostalgic love of the liturgy of his childhood, could deplore the communal dynamic of the old Mass, 'a lonely hierarchy facing a group of laymen each one of whom is shut off in his own missal or devotional book'. During the Council he would declare that the Latin Mass of his youth was 'archaeological', and presented a picture 'so encrusted that the original image could hardly be seen': it was therefore 'a closed book to the faithful', which was why the liturgy had been marginal to many of the greatest Catholics, why the great mystics, like St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Avilla, in his opinion, had drawn little or nothing of their spiritual nourishment from the Mass.[8]

The actual outcome of the liturgical movement, its drift away from a rediscovery of sources to a search for modernity, a departure, as Ratzinger understood it, from the lines laid out by Guardini and others, however, was to change his mind about all this. From a bastion of daunting antiquarianism inaccessible to ordinary Catholics, the Latin liturgy came to seem to him a precious protection against a rootless *aggiornamento*, reform understood as the adoption merely of modern intellectual and cultural fads and fashions. In common with many of the fathers of the liturgical movement, he had hoped for a reform which would clarify and make more intelligible the beauty and wisdom of the ancient worship of the Church: he was not looking for fundamental change, but careful conservation and restoration. What he thought he saw in the wake of Vatican II was a crass and faddish liturgical revolution which jettisoned Latin, and with it a thousand years of liturgical music, from the Gregorian chant which Pius X had tried to revive after centuries of neglect, to the great polyphonic masses from Palestrina to Haydn. Along with the loss of Latin went other changes which Ratzinger was convinced represented fundamental misunderstandings of the nature of liturgy: these included the introduction of improvised prayer-formulae, and the universal adoption of the westward-facing position of the priest at Mass.

For Ratzinger all this represented a disastrous break in the Church's tradition, the 'magnificent work' of Guardini and others 'thrown into the wastepaper basket',[9] the introduction into the church's worship of

[8] John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger*, Continuum 2000, pp. 73–5.
[9] *The Feast of Faith*, p. 71.

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a restless modern obsession with change and innovation for their own sakes, and a preoccupation with human community which excluded or hindered true openness to God. All this came to be summed up for him in the new Mass, introduced by Paul VI in the wake of the Council. Here is what Cardinal Ratzinger had to say about these issues, in his memoir, *Milestones*, published in 1998. The extract, which is an extended one, comes from his discussion of the early 1970s, when he was Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Regensburg.

> The second great event at the beginning of my years at Regensburg was the publication of the Missal of Paul VI, which was accompanied by the almost total prohibition, after a transitional phase of only half a year, of using the missal we had had till then. I welcomed the fact that now we had a binding liturgical text after a period of exploration that had often deformed the liturgy. But I was dismayed by the prohibition of the old missal, since nothing of the sort had ever happened in the entire history of the liturgy . . .. The prohibition of the missal that was now decreed, a missal that had known continuous growth over the centuries . . . introduced a breach into the history of the liturgy whose consequences could only be tragic. It was reasonable and right of the Council to order a revision of the missal such as had taken place before and which this time was to be more thorough than before, above all because of the introduction of the vernacular. But more than this now happened. The old building was now demolished, and another was built, to be sure largely using the old building plans.

He concedes that the new missal had many marvellous things in it but,

> setting it as a new construction over against what had grown historically, forbidding the results of that historical growth, thereby makes the liturgy appear to be no longer a living development, but the product of erudite work and juridical authority. This has caused us enormous harm.

This matters because, Ratzinger believed,

> when liturgy is self-made . . . it can no longer give us what its proper gift should be, the encounter with the mystery that is not our own product, but rather our origin and the source of our life.

Declaring his conviction that 'the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is to a large extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy', he called for a new liturgical movement, a movement of liturgical reconciliation which would recognise 'the unity of the history of the liturgy, and that understands Vatican II not as a break but as a stage of development'.[10]

[10] *Milestones*, p. 146ff.

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In recent years he has returned again and again in his writings and speeches to his conviction that the imposition of the *Missa Normativa*, what he prefers to call the Missal of Paul VI, as the sole legitimate liturgical norm for Roman Catholics, was nothing short of a catastrophe. For Ratzinger the theologian, following Guardini, the power of the Tradition to mediate to us the Divine is derived from the fact that we experience that tradition as a *given*, something which is in the first place the self-giving of God, a participation in the worship of the Incarnate Logos, directed to the Father in the Spirit, and, secondarily, the distillation of the Church's age-old encounter with that Lord. On both counts, it is emphatically not something we make up or improvise for ourselves. Liturgical change and revision is a constant of the Church's life, whose necessity and value he accepts, but that revision must always happen, and, till Vatican II, he believes only ever happened historically, as a process of refinement and purification of what went before, never as a fresh start. It is of the essence of our encounter with God within the liturgy that we experience the liturgy precisely as the gift of God, an entry into the *obsequium rationabile*, the rational worship of the Logos, and therefore as an inheritance, a space we inhabit as others have inhabited it before us, never as an instrument we design or manipulate. He considers that we in the West have much to learn from the orthodox description of the liturgy as "Divine Liturgy", for this reminds us that we receive it, not invent it. Self-made liturgy is for him an abomination, and indeed a contradiction in terms, and so he distrusts and resists liturgies which emphasise spontaneity, self-expression and local inculturation at the expense of the tried and tested forms. In 2000 he published a major study of the liturgy called, in tribute to Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. It is not in my view one of Ratzinger's best books, but in it, at the end of a rather pedestrian exploration of the Exodus story as a theological paradigm for understanding the liturgy, he comes up with the following revealing – and really rather savage – passage on the Golden Calf, behind which can be discerned his low opinion of much modern Catholic liturgy.

> The worship of the Golden Calf is a self-generated cult. When Moses stays away for too long, and God himself becomes inaccessible, the people just fetch him back. Worship becomes a feast that the community gives itself, a festival of self-affirmation. Instead of being worship of God, it becomes a circle closed in on itself: eating, drinking and making merry. It is a kind of banal self-gratification. The narrative of the Golden Calf is a warning about any kind of self-initiated and self-seeking worship. Ultimately it is no longer concerned with God but with giving oneself a nice little alternative world, manufactured from one's own resources.[11]

[11] J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 23.

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Ratzinger's fundamental objections to what I may call the spirit of the new liturgy lie in what he sees as its human-centred frenetic busyness, which, instead of opening us out to God, closes us in on ourselves. He believes that behind this phenomenon lies a whole raft of disastrous cultural, sociological and aesthetic convergences linked to the time in which the liturgical reforms were carried out, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a catastrophic theological mistake. Twentieth-century theologies of the Eucharist, he believes, have placed excessive emphasis on the paradigmatic character of the Last Supper, and hence have constructed liturgical practice round the mistaken notion that the fundamental form of the Eucharist as that of a meal, in the process underplaying the cosmic, redemptive, and sacrificial character of the Mass. Calvary and the empty tomb, rather than the Upper Room, are the symbolic locations of Christian liturgy. This takes us to the heart of Ratzinger's theological reflection on the meaning of the Mass, and the roots of his unease with much in modern eucharistic celebration, and so it's worth teasing out rather carefully.

His most extended discussion of this question comes in a paper he published in 1977 on 'Form and Content in the Eucharistic Celebration', reissued, in a slightly amplified form in 1981, in the remarkably rich little collection *The Feast of Faith*.[12] Ratzinger considers in this paper the attempt by Guardini and the other fathers of the liturgical movement to discern underneath all the rites and complexities of the Mass the master 'form' which INforms it, which is 'as such, the key to what takes place in the Eucharist', and which would provide the key to its REform. Once discerned, this 'form' could be used 'to determine whether particular aspects were to be heightened or lightened. Thus the concept of form or structure, *Gestalt*, a hitherto unknown category entered the theological dialogue, clearly recognisable as a power for reform'.[13]

Few had then doubted that the obvious key to this form was the fact that it had been instituted at the Last Supper, and took the form of a meal. 'It seemed therefore that the Eucharist's basic structure was unequivocally that of a meal', and this was the position adopted by Guardini and most other theorists of liturgical reform from the 1930s onwards. Immediately, however, the dogmatic theologians detected a problem. Was not this precisely the position Luther had adopted in renaming the Mass the Lord's Supper, and hence, was not this the view condemned at Trent? Did not an account of the Mass as in essence a meal reduce or obliterate its sacrificial character? According to Ratzinger, the response of German liturgists like Joseph Pascher

[12] Originally published as 'Gestalt und Gehalt der eucharistischen Feier', *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift* 6, 1977, pp. 385–96; *Feast of Faith*, pp. 33–60.

[13] *The Feast of Faith*, p. 34.

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was to argue that we were dealing here with two different levels of discourse. To call the Mass a sacrifice was 'a dogmatic statement referring to the hidden theological essence of what takes place in it; to speak of the meal structure, on the other hand, was to direct attention to the visible liturgical performance, in no way denying the theological content defined by Trent. What was presented liturgically in the structure of the meal could without difficulty mediate what, dogmatically speaking, was a sacrifice'.

In Ratzinger's judgement, this was a fudge, concealing a sort of theological schizophrenia: if the structure of the liturgy was not a mere ceremonial form, but 'at its core an indispensable manifestation of its essential content', then the sacrificial character of the Eucharist had to be more evident in its celebration than this account permitted. The lack of clarity caused by this apparent separation of dogmatic content and liturgical structure, even during the Council itself, seemed to him 'the central problem of the liturgical reform'. He suspected that thorough-going proponents of the 'meal' view did not in fact attach any real meaning to the Church's teaching that the Mass was a sacrifice, and he took a low view of attempts to meet this difficulty by discerning symbols of sacrifice within the meal structure itself, such as Pascher's suggestion that 'the separation of the bread and wine' represented, symbolically, 'the fatal spilling of Jesus' blood'.

For Ratzinger the draconian solution to this problem was to jettison the notion that the fundamental form of the Eucharist is in fact that of a meal. He was building here on suggestions from the liturgist Joseph Jungmann, first, that the fundamental form of the Eucharist after the Apostolic Age (that is, when we first begin to be able to say anything positive about its celebration) is not that of meal but of *Eucharistia*, the prayer of thanksgiving. *Eucharistia* is what the celebration is called from the earliest post-biblical sources and, at all times in Christian history till the Reformation, the prayer of thanksgiving has been a more prominent feature of the external celebration than the meal aspect. Second, Ratzinger cited Jungmann in support of the view that an examination of the patristic and medieval literature on Eucharist reveals that, apart from I Corinthians 11 and direct discussions of it, the Eucharist is seldom or never referred to in the tradition as a *supper* until the sixteenth-century Reformers did so: after the Apostolic Age, when the Eucharist was as a matter of fact embedded in a community meal, 'the designation of the Eucharist as a meal', Ratzinger writes, 'does not occur again until the sixteenth-century'.

I suspect in the semantic shift from "supper" to "meal" Ratzinger overstates his case: to look no further, the Corpus Christi antiphon '*O Sacrum Convivium*', certainly describes the Eucharist as a meal, for that is one of the principal meanings of the word *convivium*, and can hardly be considered marginal to the tradition of eucharistic

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reflection in the medieval church. Be that as it may, he insists that 'the *Eucharistic* thesis is able to put the dogmatic and liturgical levels in touch with each other', for the eucharistic thanksgiving is the form in which Jesus at his Last Supper attached sacrificial meaning to his death, and identified the elements of bread and wine with his flesh and blood given for the forgiveness of sins. Hence, the eucharistic prayer is the fundamental form of the eucharistic sacrifice, the *oblatio rationabilis* of which the Mass itself speaks. The notion of a verbal sacrifice is derived from pagan antiquity as well as from the Old Testament concept of the spiritual sacrifice, so the Eucharist is, first and foremost, a prayer. The prayer of Jesus over the bread and wine at the Last Supper transforms the Passover Haggadah by applying it to his death: the eucharistic words of Jesus are the transformation of existence – and of death – into thanksgiving, and the words 'this is my body, this is my blood, given for you' are derived both from the Temple sacrifices and from the sacrificial suffering of the Servant in Second Isaiah. Hence, the Canon of the Mass, derived from the Haggadah of Jesus, is 'the true sacrifice, the word of the Word: in it speaks the one who, as Word, is life'.[14] So, 'the Eucharistic prayer is an entering into the prayer of Jesus himself, and provides a profoundly Trinitarian understanding of the nature of the Eucharistic sacrifice: it is the Church's entering into the Logos, the Father's Word, into the Logos's self-surrender to the Father, which in the Cross, has also become the surrender of mankind to him'. Moreover, on this privileging of the eucharistic prayer as the essential form of the Mass, the meal element is preserved, since the form of the eucharistic prayer is also '*but not solely*', the grace said before the sacred meal.

Ratzinger, of course, recognises and emphasises the centrality of the theme of nourishment in the Eucharist, and in his preaching and devotional writing is happy to emphasise it: so, in representative eucharistic homilies he can describe the Eucharist as the 'Feast of Faith', 'the Banquet of the Reconciled', and declare that 'it is the royal privilege of the Christian to share in paschal fellowship with the Lord in the Paschal Mystery. The Lord has made the first day of the week his own day, on which he comes to us, on which he spreads the table for us and invites us to share with him'.[15] But he is equally concerned to limit the use of this meal symbolism as the theological key to the eucharistic mystery as a whole: 'the meal', he insists, 'is subordinated to a larger whole and integrated into it'.[16] Indeed, in employing the phrase 'the Banquet of the Reconciled' Ratzinger seeks to limit the associations of the Eucharist with meals, because the Eucharist is

[14] J. Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist the Heart of Life*, San Francisco 2003, pp. 42–55, quotation from p. 51.

[15] *God Is Near Us*, pp. 56–73.

[16] *The Feast of Faith*, p. 38f.

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the banquet of the reconciled – Holy things for the Holy, the family meal of those who have 'let themselves be reconciled by God, who have become members of his family and put themselves into his hands'.[17] So the Eucharist is to be sharply distinguished from Jesus' table-fellowship with sinners during his life; those meals are NOT forerunners of the Eucharist. The Passover dimension of the Last Supper was crucial to Christian understanding of the meaning of the death of Jesus, and hence of the Eucharist, but the Passover meal, a once-a-year event, was not what Jesus commanded to be continued in the Church's breaking of bread, any more than was the Apostolic Agape, to which the Eucharist was attached at Corinth in the first Christian generation.[18] So, with considerable daring, he asserts 'The real mistake of those who attempt uncritically to deduce the Christian liturgy from the Last Supper lies in their failing to see this fundamental point: the Last Supper of Jesus is certainly the basis of all Christian liturgy, but in itself it is not yet Christian'. We may, therefore, take the earlier suggestions of the liturgical movement and turn them on their head: 'the Last Supper is the foundation of the dogmatic content of the Christian Eucharist, not of its liturgical form. The latter does not yet exist'.[19]

Ratzinger was to refine this argument subsequently in the light of the work of the German exegete H.Gese, who argued that at the Last Supper, Jesus presented his death, and hence the Eucharist, as a thanksgiving sacrifice, the *toda* alluded to in Psalms 69, 51, 40 and 22, 'the great Christological Psalms of the New Testament'. He has returned to this theme in later writings, seeing in the evolution of the Mass away from the Supper and from the Apostolic Agape, not a falling away from primitive purity and simplicity, but the right and natural freeing of the Christian rite, with its immense Trinitarian significance and its sacrificial heart, from the historical contingencies which surrounded its origins. The emergence of the Mass rite, combining liturgy of the word and liturgy of sacrifice, was thus the fulfilment of the whole of Israelite religion, both teaching and cult. 'This new and all-encompassing form of worship could not be derived from the meal, but had to be defined through the interconnection of Temple and Synagogue, Word and Sacrament, Cosmos and Liturgy'.[20]

There is behind all this a characteristic insistence on the integrity of the tradition as a whole, a rejection of the idea of any rift between the Church and the Apostles or Christ. The actual shape of the unfolding tradition is the legitimate and right expression of Christ's

[17] *God Is Near Us*, p. 61.

[18] Though he acknowledges in *Deus Caritas Est* the validity of calling Eucharist 'Agape' – see note 1 above.

[19] *The Feast of Faith*, p. 41

[20] J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 78.

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will for his Church, hence his growing resistance to the idea of Vatican II as a drastic purification of the decadent forms of Christianity. And it will be evident that this specific questioning of one of the building-blocks of modern liturgical reform places Ratzinger at right-angles to a good deal of the most characteristic features of the post-conciliar liturgy. Reject the paradigm of the meal as the interpretative key to the Mass and the inner logic of many of the post-conciliar changes collapses, from the reorientation of sanctuaries to the deliberate cultivation of community spirit in such institutions as the holy handshake. Ratzinger, incidentally, though insistent on the communal dimensions of eucharistic union with Christ, nevertheless thinks 'community', *Gemeinde*, as a theological category, is a Protestant rather than a Catholic concept, pointing out that it is a term barely used by the Council, and then without any consistency in what the term denotes.[21] In a word, he finds himself at odds with a good deal that has been taken to be most characteristic of post-conciliar liturgical practice. We now have a Pope profoundly unhappy about much of what goes on in our parish churches Sunday by Sunday. I think I can best convey the essence of his position by considering three related issues: the notion of the "active participation" of everyone present at Mass, the role of silence in the Mass, and the position of the priest at the altar.

Perhaps the most crucial single utterance in the whole of the documents of the Second Vatican Council occurs at paragraph 14 of the Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. It runs like this:

> Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people . . . have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.
>
> In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy the full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else . . . . Therefore, in all their apostolic activity, pastors of souls should energetically set about achieving it through the required pedagogy.

Later in the document, in paragraph 30, this '*participatio actuosa*' is characterised and described in the following terms:

> To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes. And at the proper time a reverent silence should be observed.

[21] See the remarks in Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, San Francisco 1987, p. 288f.

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'Full, conscious and active participation', pastoral energy and liturgical pedagogy: these were momentous notions. As anyone who has lived through the two generations of change which flowed from these paragraphs knows, they were to have revolutionary implications for the character and celebration of Catholic liturgy and sacraments for, in accordance with them both, rites and texts were revised and simplified so that the people 'should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively, and as a community', and the Mass itself became an altogether more vocal and activity-centred event.

We are only now, I think, beginning to be in a position to draw up a balance sheet of loss and gain from these changes, which were based on the assumption that the mysteries celebrated in the sacraments could or should be 'understood with ease', that the liturgy was an activity concerned primarily with pedagogy, that liturgical rites should be 'short, clear and free from useless repetitions', or that 'full, conscious and active participation' in worship and sacraments inevitably involved ritual regimentation, with everybody doing or saying or listening to the same things, at the same moment, all the time.

Pope Benedict believes that all this is destructive of true worship. The liturgy is meant to still and calm human activity, to allow God to be God, to quiet our chatter in favour of attention to the Word of God, in reflection on scripture, in which Christ too is present, and in our sacramental encounter, in adoration and communion, with the great self-gift of the Word incarnate in the Blessed Sacrament. So excessive business and too much talk, even holy talk, subvert the essence of the Mass. The call for instant accessibility is a mistake and a misunderstanding, which has dumbed down the mystery we celebrate, and left us with a banal, thin and inadequate language of prayer. He deplores the 'theatricalisation' of liturgy by the introduction of too many actions, too many people, too much business. He rejects especially the value of improvisation and spontaneity, as contradicting the universal character of liturgy, and as subjecting congregations to the often lamentably deficient talents of those doing the improvising. As he has said, 'Only respect for the liturgy's fundamental unspontaneity and pre-existing identity can give us what we hope for: the feast in which the great reality comes to us which we ourselves do not manufacture but receive as a gift'.[22] He doubts the value of offertory processions, the kiss of peace (which disrupts the adoring silence of communion) and even the desirability of the invariable recitation of the eucharistic prayers aloud. He considers that it would deepen our awareness that the Mass was more than a meal celebrating and consolidating community if we more often abstained from communion

[22] J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 168.

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– maybe by discontinuing the communion of the faithful on Good Friday. He deplores the disappearance of the magnificent repertoire of European liturgical music and its replacement with vulgar and trivialised 'utility music', often derived from a profane and secularising culture which he believes is incompatible with the Gospel. In part his objection here is unashamedly elitist – he thinks most modern liturgical music is banal, and that we have wantonly thrown away the highest fruits of European culture in favour of what is cheapest and most ephemeral. He has commented sarcastically that 'It is strange, that in their legitimate delight in the new openness to other cultures, many people seem to have forgotten that the countries of Europe also have a musical inheritance which . . . has sprung from the very heart of the Church and her faith'.[23]

As for 'active participation', he argues that it emphatically does not mean participation in many acts. Rather, it means a deeper entry by everyone present into the one great action of the liturgy, its only real action, which is Christ's self-giving on the cross. For Ratzinger Article 30 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not mean we should all be doing stuff at Mass all the time. Quite the contrary. With its mention of bodily gesture and of silence as well as words and activity as modes of participation, the Council suggests, he maintains, that we can best enter into the action of the Mass by a recollected silence, and by traditional gestures of self-offering and adoration – the sign of the cross, folded hands, reverent kneeling. And above all silence, silence by the people AND silence by the priest: he has repeatedly argued that it would be a good thing if the eucharistic prayer were not always recited aloud. Instead the priest might simply recite aloud the opening words of each paragraph, so that the laity are able to identify the point in the prayer he has reached. They can then follow in their missals and in their hearts, reverently internalising in silence the meaning of the prayer, in a way impossible when they have to listen to the priest reciting aloud words which in any case threaten to lose their impact from over-familiarity and boredom.

Pope Benedict's views on the position of the priest at the altar are in line with all this, and, above all, here we can see one of the practical workings-out of his privileging of the eucharistic prayer over the sharing of food in the Mass. For twenty years he has argued that the spread of the celebration of Mass *versus populum*, facing the people, is a catastrophic error. Derived from the currency of the meal paradigm, it was not in fact ordered by the Council and rests, he believes, on bad historical scholarship, bad theology, and bad social anthropology. As we have seen, Guardini had pioneered this form of celebration as a means of restoring among his students a sense

[23] *The Feast of Faith*, p. 125.

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of the reality and immediacy of their involvement in the liturgy, but no-one anticipated its universal adoption in the wake of the Council, and the reconstruction and reordering of most Catholic churches to make any other form of celebration impossible. The rationale for this development will be familiar to all of you. Here is how Cardinal Ratzinger described it in 2000.

> The Eucharist, so it was said, had to be celebrated *versus populum*. The altar, as can be seen in the normative model of St Peter's, had to be positioned in such a way that the priest and people looked at each other and formed together the circle of the celebrating community. This alone, so it was said, was compatible with the meaning of the Christian liturgy, with the requirement of active participation. This alone conformed to the primordial model of the Last Supper.[24]

All of this, he believes, is founded in misunderstanding. As we have seen, he does not consider that the Mass is properly understood primarily as a meal, and hence, the physical dispositions for a meal can have no normative function in the liturgy. In any case, meals in antiquity did not resemble, or mandate, celebration versus *populum*. At the last supper Jesus did not face the apostles but, in the classical manner, must have lain to one side of the loop of a U-shaped table. The Pope at the altar of St Peter's does indeed stand facing the people, but this is because St Peter's, unlike the majority of ancient churches, is orientated West-East, not East-West, and so the Pope in standing behind the altar, faces East, the universal position for both priest and people during the eucharistic prayer in the early church. This eastward-facing position for the priest is not a matter of standing back to the people, but of everyone, including the priest, facing the same way, towards the rising Sun which symbolises the Risen Christ, the Second Coming, and the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist. In this gesture the Church expresses the true form of the Mass, the *Eucharistia*, confesses the sovereignty of God, and expresses her hope and conviction that the Eucharist opens outwards towards eternity. She acknowledges the incompleteness of our salvation here, and displays her yearning for the return of our Saviour. By contrast, the closed circle of the community when priest and people face each other across the altar is, in his view, a closing down against the transcendent God, a centredness on ourselves and our self-created community which represents a break with the eschatological openness symbolised by the orientation of two millennia of Christian celebration. So this reordering, he insists, 'not only signifies a new external arrangement of the places dedicated to the liturgy, but also

[24] J. Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 77.

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brings with it a new idea of the essence of the liturgy, the liturgy as a communal meal'.[25]

> The turning of the priest to the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form it no longer opens out towards what is ahead and above, but is closed in on itself.... [Whereas in the past, by facing East at Mass] They did not close themselves into a circle; they did not gaze at one another; but as the pilgrim people of God they set off for the *Oriens*, for the Christ who comes to meet us.[26]

In the light of these strong opinions of Cardinal Ratzinger, what is Pope Benedict XVI likely to do to remedy what he perceives as this great breach in the Catholic memory? We have a Pope who has made clear his strong and controversial views on many contested aspects of Catholic worship, and these include a decisive rejection of types of music, art and language which in his view are Trojan horses, smuggling into Christian worship values deeply inimical to it. If the Eucharist is the Church's entrance into the rational worship of the Logos, everything in the liturgy must reflect the coherence and enhancement of meaning which the Logos brings. Hence his rejection of rock music – and many kinds of ethnic music – in Catholic worship, for they represent the chaotic and elemental triumph of the Dionysian over the harmony of Apollo/Christ. He believes that the Tridentine Mass, whatever the difficulties of comprehension and participation it presented, embodied fundamental Christian perceptions undervalued or ignored in modern Catholic worship, and he wishes to see the return of a eucharistic prayer recited silently, in whole or in part, and the celebration of Mass with both priest and people facing East.

Not much of this, it seems, is likely to become papal policy; after the sometimes hectic energy of his predecessor, Benedict XVI has proved gratifyingly inert as a pope. He has more than once indicated his sensitivity to the dangers of liturgical fatigue among the laity, and he has said that constant change, even change back towards the traditional ways of doing things, can be very destructive. The liturgy is about stability and openness towards eternity, not about restless innovation or the restoration of the past. Certainly he believes that there is an urgent need to correct abuses in Catholic worship. At his inauguration mass, loudspeakers issued warnings against non-Catholics in St Peter's Square taking communion, and lectured Catholics on the proper posture and frame of mind for devout and fruitful reception. The encyclical *Ecclesia in Eucharistia,* which he helped John Paul II to draft, speaks rather ominously of 'juridical interventions' to correct

[25] *Ibid*.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 80.

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liturgical abuse and, in his inaugural address to the cardinals, he called on Catholics everywhere to demonstrate their eucharistic faith in the 'solemnity and correctness' of their eucharistic celebrations. At one stage it looked likely that Benedict would lift the restrictions on the celebration of the Tridentine liturgy, restrictions which, as we have seen, for him embody a deep and disastrous rupture in the continuity of Catholic tradition, and a scarring of the Church's memory. He has not yet done so.

But you may recall that, among the disastrous consequences which Ratzinger the theologian saw flowing from the imposition of the new liturgy, was the fact that it rested not on immemorial tradition, on the liturgy as the received product of two millennia of the Church's lived experience but, instead, derived its binding force from a juridical act of the Pope Paul VI. In the imposition of the Missal of Paul VI, Ratzinger saw the tradition set aside in the name of a liturgy invented by scholars and imposed by arbitrary and irresponsible papal command, or, as he says, living development set aside in favour of 'erudite work and juridical authority'. It is a paradox that a man universally seen as the chief defender of and apologist for a strongly centralising papal authority should feel so deeply that that the exercise of that authority under Paul VI had created a disastrous hiatus in the continuity of the tradition, the evil consequences of which the Church is still suffering. Ratzinger the theologian understands the nature of tradition as an organic cumulative growth, a plant unfolding, not a machine constructed, and possessing an inherent authority and identity deeper than and prior to the exercise of any hierarchical jurisdiction, however much the instincts of Ratzinger the Curial official might be thought to be at odds with that perception. In 2000 in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, he even spelled out the limits on the Pope's right to change the liturgy. He remarked that in the history of the Western Church,

> the pope more and more clearly took over responsibility for liturgical legislation, thus providing a juridical authority for the continuing formation of the liturgy. The more vigorously the primacy was displayed, the more the question came up about the limits and extent of this authority .... After the Second Vatican Council, the impression arose that the pope really could do anything in liturgical matters, especially if he were acting on the mandate of an ecumenical council. Eventually the idea of the giveness of the liturgy, the fact that one cannot do with it what one will, faded from the public consciousness of the West. In fact, the First Vatican Council had in no way defined the pope as an absolute monarch. On the contrary, it presented him as the guarantee of obedience to the revealed Word. The pope's authority is bound to the tradition of faith, and that also applies to the liturgy. It is not manufactured by the authorities. Even the pope can only be

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> the humble servant of its lawful development and abiding integrity and identity.[27]

We are accustomed to think of Joseph Ratzinger as an apologist for central authority and papal power. It is salutary, and ironic, to reflect that here, in the central prayer and sacramental life of the Church, he recognises a more fundamental dimension of Catholicism, which takes precedence over mere authority, and demands our deeper loyalty.

Professor Eamon Duffy
Magdalene College
Cambridge CB3 0AG
ed10000@cam.ac.uk

[27] *Ibid*., p. 165f.

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