Inculturation of the Liturgy in Local Churches: Case of the Diocese of Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

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Inculturation of the Liturgy in Local Churches: Case of the Diocese of Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Divinity

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The *lex credendi* of the Roman Catholic Church is nowhere expressed more obviously than in its *lex orandi*. In the context of the history of salvation, liturgy is the common heritage for the entire assembly of the People of God. Throughout history, Christian liturgy has served people from various cultural settings to find their place in a common community of one faith, without losing their cultural identity. The fact that Christian liturgy is always celebrated in a specific context draws attention to the dynamics between liturgy and the world’s cultures.

The main focus in the present reflection is on liturgical inculturation in local churches, with particular attention to the Diocese of Saint Thomas in the United States Virgin Islands. In fact, liturgies in local churches are profoundly marked by cultural traits and therefore, liturgical inculturation has been a constant aspect of Christianity from its very beginnings. Indeed, Christian liturgy has the capacity to adapt in every local church. The full understanding of this affirmation requires a deep search of the origin of Christian liturgy, its development throughout history, and an illustration in a specific context.

Hence, in the first section of this investigation the focus is on the Jewish background of Christian liturgy. The second section delves deeply into the dialogue between liturgy and culture, with particular interest on the magisterial pronouncement of this relationship. And finally, the third section attempts to provide some practical means to enhance liturgy in the parish. This section also assesses and suggests ways to foster liturgical inculturation in the Islands.
CHAPTER ONE: THE JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN LITURGY

Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that the Jewish and Christian traditions share a common heritage with the same covenant, though in different stages. Christians consider the Jewish revelation as part of their own and introductory to it. The New Testament is replete with passages that show a clear continuity between these two religious traditions (Matt 28:19; Rm 11:18; Eph 2:12. 19; Jn 17:6-8). Taking into account this fact can help to better understand certain aspects of the Church’s life. Such is the case with the liturgy.

Unlike some unaware Christians who tend to juxtapose the Christian liturgy over and against the Jewish liturgy, in general the Church holds that the two liturgical traditions interact spiritually and historically. In fact, “just as the New Testament cannot adequately be comprehended on its own without a thorough steeping in the Hebrew Scriptures (…), so Christian liturgy cannot be fully appreciated without an awareness of its intimate relationship with the Jewish liturgical life…”¹

Therefore, it seems quite impossible for the Christian Church to explain many of its liturgical practices while ignoring their Jewish roots and the historical, spiritual and cultural soil from which these roots pushed their way to light. A good understanding of the Jewish background of its liturgy appears to be crucial for Christians, who, like Jews, identify themselves as a community of worship.

Jesus and his Apostles

According to the New Testament, Jesus and his first disciples fully participated in Jewish worship. In fact, the Gospels attest to the presence of Jesus in the temple at many occasions (Matt 21:12; Lk 22:53; Jn 7:14; 10:22:23). In addition, Jesus and his Apostles were accustomed to synagogue worship (Matt 4:23; 12:35; Mk 6:2; Jn 6:59). Jesus was often in the synagogue of Capernaum and Nazareth (Matt 12:9; 13:54; Mk 1:21, Jn 18:20, etc). According to Cavaletti, from the beginning of his ministry, Jesus himself constantly placed his teaching in the context of synagogue worship; precisely, he situated his teaching within the framework of the proclamation of the Word of God in the synagogue. In the synagogue of Nazareth, for example, he proclaimed the Word of God and announced its fulfillment in his person (Lk 4: 16-19). On that day in the synagogue of Nazareth, the synagogal liturgy became the Christian liturgy of the Word, the proclamation that salvation is already present there in Jesus Christ. Referring to an image used by Bouyer, Di Sante emphasizes the fact that Jesus should not be considered as a ‘meteorite that fell to earth in Palestine’. Rather, he was a Jew who worshipped in a specific place with others.

After the departure of Jesus from earthly life, the Apostles frequently worshiped in the temple of Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 3:1-3; 5:12. 21; Mtt21: 23; Mk 13: 1; Lk 21:5) they continued to teach in the synagogue (Acts 9:20; 13:14; 16:13; 17:2; 19:8). Cavaletti notes that even Saint Paul visited a synagogue on the Sabbath at Antioch in Pisidia, where he was invited by the head of the community to speak. He used the opportunity to

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Experience of the Early Church

Christianity developed from the soil of Judaism; it was considered a Jewish messianic sect. In due course the Jewish Christians were included in the category of those sectarians whom the Jewish community rejected and anathematized. Given the fact that new sects, in general, do not deliberately create or invent a new liturgy from nothing, continuity in liturgical practices has surely existed between Jews and the first disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, “the originality of Christian worship is not that it abolishes Jewish worship but that it reforms and develops that worship, in accordance with Jesus’ teaching and recognition of his saving work. Thus, the background to Christian worship is, at the outset, Judaism, and especially Jewish worship, as established in the Old Testament and as practiced in the first century.”5

Moreover, Beckwith argues that the centers of worship for Jewish Christians before the destruction of the second temple of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) were the same as those of Jews; namely, the temple, synagogues and homes. Because of the fact that the Jewish Christians attempted to maintain the ordinances of Judaism alongside their Christian counterparts, they undoubtedly observed the Jewish pattern of worship on weekdays, on Sabbaths, and on annual festivals of Judaism as well, and they did it in

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4 Fisher, 14.
much the same way as other Jews, except in situations where they had to witness to
Christian truths.\textsuperscript{6} The Jewish liturgical influence can be noticed in various aspects.

**The First Christian Prayers**

Many Christian prayer forms of the early Church share numerous similarities with
the Jewish prayer forms.

The influence of the Jewish liturgy on the early Church and its forms of worship is
nowhere so clearly to be discerned as in the prayers that have been preserved in the early
Christian literature and the earliest forms of Christian liturgy. Nobody, in reading the pre-
Christian forms of prayer in the Jewish Liturgy and the prayers of the early Church, can
fail to notice the similarity of atmosphere of each, or to recognize that both proceed from
the same mould. Even when one perceives, as often happens, variety in the latter form,
the genus is unmistakable.\textsuperscript{7}

In fact, the characteristic marks of the temple and synagogue prayers are to be found in
the prayers of the early Church. Oesterley identifies and summarizes these common
elements, which are: praise and thanksgiving (especially for the power of God as seen in
the creation, for his guardianship, for deliverance from evil, and spiritual enlightenment,
concluding with confession and prayer for forgiveness), the sense of corporateness,
intercessory prayer, petitions (less prominent in Christian than in Jewish prayers), and
concluding doxology. Additionally, the historical reminiscence which occur in many of
the Jewish prayers are often taken over by the Church and adopted in a Christian sense.\textsuperscript{8}

The first Christians observed the same rule of three hours of the prayers of the
synagogue worship, that is, the third hour (Acts 3:15, the sixth hour (Acts 10:9), and the
ninth hour (Acts 3:1). In the synagogue, this timing corresponds to the morning,
afternoon, and evening prayer. Similarly, the Didaché informs us that the Lord’s Prayer

\textsuperscript{6} Beckwith, Roger, T., *Daily and Weekly Worship: from Jewish to Christian*, Oxford: Warden of Latimer
House, 21.

\textsuperscript{7} Idelson, A., Z., *Jewish Liturgy and its Development*, New York: Schocken Books, 1967, 301 (see also
Fisher, 44 and Beckwith, 38ff).

\textsuperscript{8} Oesterley, D. D., *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*, New York: Oxford University Press,
1965, 126. (First Printing, 1925).
was said three times daily.\textsuperscript{9} Commenting on this recommendation of the Didaché, Milavec declares that “the uses of the plural in both the instruction and the prayer itself probably indicates that a group recitation was implied. This would not necessarily mean that the entire community would gather three time each day; rather, those working in the same shop or those in the same household would gather to pray.”\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, according to some sources, early Christian prayers (cf. \textit{Apostolic Constitutions} 7:35–38; \textit{Didaché} 9–10) are merely quotations or adaptations from Jewish originals. The Jewish origins are also evident in many prayer formulas (e.g., Amen, Hallelujah), the Lord’s Prayer, and in many ritual institutions (e.g., Baptism) regardless of their specifically Christian transformations. Thus it can reasonably be argued that numerous Jewish prayers have been Christianized, as illustrated below.

\textbf{Christianization of Jewish Prayers}

\textbf{The berakah (Prayer of benediction)}

Jesus used the \textit{berakah} on many occasions (Matt 11:25-27; Mk 6:11; 8:6-7; 10:16; 14:22-24; Lk 10:21-22; Jn 11:41, etc). Saint Paul can be considered the great Apostle of thanksgiving, because most of his letters are suffused with such prayers (Rom 1:8; 1Cor 1: 4-6; Col 1:3; Eph 1:3; 3:20; Phil 1:3-5; 2:6; 1Thes 1:2-4; 2Thes 1:3; Phil 4ff; 2Tm 1:3). He also urges Christians to utter \textit{berakah} to God in the name of Jesus Christ (Col 3:17; Eph 5:18-20). The presence of the \textit{berakah} in the Christian liturgical forms of prayer is not surprising. According to Burns,

\textsuperscript{9} Didache’ 8:3.
The Christian prayers of the Eucharist belong to this class of Jewish prayers called the berakhah which gives praise and thanks for God’s gift. Christian celebrations of the Eucharist were the product of the combination of the blessings associated with the scripture readings in the synagogue and the blessings associated with the ceremonial meal in the home. To be more precise, the Eucharist took its form from the berakhah over the last cup which ended the meal.\(^{11}\)

Just like Jews, the disciples of Jesus Christ were called to offer thanksgiving and praise to God (*berakhah*) in every circumstance of their lives, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist.

**The shema’** (profession of faith)

From the Gospel we know that Jesus referred to a biblical passage of the *shema’* (Deut 6:4-9) when replying to the scribe who asked him what commandment was the first of all (Mk 12: 28-30). From this passage of the Gospel of Mark, as Loewe believes, we can assert that “to Jesus the *shema’* represented just as much as it did to Rabbis. There can be little doubt that to the disciples the *shema’* was as precious as it was to their Master.”\(^{12}\) In the same order of ideas, Di Sante affirms, “day after day, morning and evening, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and the first Christian communities all nourished their souls on this prayer.”\(^{13}\)

Aware of the supreme importance of the *shema’* in Jewish liturgy and that the doctrine of the unity of God constitutes the foundation-stone of Judaism, Oesterley also thinks that “the first Christians were accustomed to reciting the *shema’* twice daily, and therefore it cannot be doubted that they were strongly influenced by its teaching.”\(^{14}\)

Oesterley elaborates his argument noting that the early Christian communities’ doctrine

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\(^{13}\) Di Sante, 52.

\(^{14}\) Oesterley, 111-112.
of God was influenced by the shema’, especially in relation to the debates on the identity of Jesus vis-à-vis God the Father and the debate on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He declares: “when (...) we remember how deeply rooted and venerated the shema’ and its teaching were among the Jews, and therefore among the Jewish Christians, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the controversies of the Church during the earliest Christian centuries regarding the doctrine of God must be ultimately traced back to its influence.”

In fact, the Fathers of the Church fought strongly to profess and to uphold both the unity of God and the Holy Trinity. In spite of this influence claimed by Oesterley, a question of considerable importance can still be asked: why is it that the shema’ disappeared from the Christian liturgy?

Loewe is very much concerned with the question of the disappearance of the shema’ in the Christian liturgy later in the Church. In his article The Jewish Background to the Christian Liturgy, he reports Oesterley’s response to the question, and then responds with his own hypothesis. While Oesterley suggests that the uncompromising monotheism of the shema’ was the reason for its rejection, Loewe thinks that this was rather a reason for its retention. Since the whole basis of the Trinity is that it is not incompatible with the unity of God, the early Christian would have held close to the shema’, though they would have explained it in a Trinitarian sense. Hence, abandoning the shema’ would have rather declared them to be no longer monotheist. Loewe believes that the shema’ was abandoned because it led up to the belief in the law, given that the question of the law was at issue and prompted each decision.

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15 Oesterley, 125-125.
16 Loewe, 69.
**The Teffilah or ‘amidah** (eighteen blessings)

Jesus used the theology of the first two of the Eighteen Blessings to answer the Sadducees when they challenged him regarding the resurrection of the dead (Mt 22:23-33; Mk 12:26-27; Lk 20:27-40). Loewe is convinced of the fact that “the ‘amidah was known to Jesus and used by him. Only in this light can we explain the method employed by Jesus to demonstrate the future life: ‘God of Abraham, God of Israel, God of the living, not of the dead’.”

On the path of their master, the Apostles and the first Christians would have had no reason not to use the prayer of the ‘amidah. “In the ordinary ‘amidah, excluding one or two passages, there is nothing that the early Christians could not have said.” Moreover, some liturgical attitudes in the Church from the beginning also suggest the teffilah’s influence. For instance, Di Sante argues that the Jewish standing posture during the teffilah was taken over by Christian tradition, where it becomes one of the basic postures of ecclesial prayer.

In addition, the trisagion or tersanctus of the Christian liturgy was modeled on Jewish prayers, especially the kedushah of the Morning Prayer. It is worth mentioning that the kedushah (qedushah) is the third part of the teffilah. In fact, “the recitation in the synagogue by the first Jewish Christians of the kedushah ensured its continuance in Christian worship after their final withdrawal from the Jewish Church. Hence we find in the earliest records of specifically Christian worship the mention of the trisagion as it came to be called.”

Oesterley argues that the trisagion was the earliest and most

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 70.
19 Di Sante, 79.
20 Oesterley, 146.
important hymn of the Church. Many Fathers of the Church mention it in their writings. For example, Tertullian refers to it as the sanctus, the hymn of praise to God, sung before the Eucharistic Prayer; he is the first to apply this name (sanctus) to the trisagion.\textsuperscript{21} The sanctus is also rooted in the Old Testament (Isa 6:3; Dn 7:10; Ps 148; 118:25). Moreover, Loewe believes that the Christian prayer the Te Deum, is an obvious kedushah (sanctification of the Name). He affirms: “there can, I fancy, be little doubt that the fourth century author of this hymn has seen a Qedush-shah and had modeled it for Christian use. As the ‘thrice holy’ is found in the Disdascalia, the Qedush-shah must have been retained in the early Christian liturgies, especially as the application to the Trinity would be so obvious.”\textsuperscript{22}

Furthermore, Oesterley uses a series of comparisons to illustrate the influence of the teffilah on early Christian worship. He compares some passages from the Eighteen Benedictions with extracts from the earliest sources of Christian worship like the Fist Epistle of Clement, the Didache’, the First Apology of Justin Martyr, the Liturgy of Serapion, and the apostolic Constitution. From these comparisons, Oesterley concludes that the thoughts and the general content are the same in the teffilah and the early Christian prayers, the later being adaptions of the former.\textsuperscript{23} One of the most apparent connections between the teffilah and Christian prayers is in the Lord’s Prayer, but we will deal with this later.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Oesterley, 145-146.
\item[22] Loewe, 71.
\item[23] Oesterley, 127-137.
\end{footnotes}
The Epiclesis

Based on Oesterley’s research, the Jewish conception of the shekinah (Jewish prayer to draw the Lord down and make him present in the temple) gave birth to the Epiclesis prayer in the Eucharistic worship of the Christian Church from the earliest time. In its earliest form, the Epiclesis consisted solely of prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the assembled worshippers. So at first there was no thought of making bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Christ through the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon them. In any case, Oesterley is convinced of the fact that: “the content of the simpler and more primitive form of the Epiclesis prayer is essentially Jewish; and the Shekinah conception, teaching the truth of the Divine Presence among worshippers, is precisely that which prompts it. The conclusion seems, therefore, irresistible that the origin of the Epiclesis is to be sought in the Jewish conception of the Shekinah.”

The psalms (sacred songs)

The use of the psalms is attested to in the Christian worship from its beginning (1Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). This liturgical prayer can only have been adopted from the Jewish practice. In fact, as Oesterley states: “The Jewish liturgical use of them had been continued uninterruptedly by the Christian Church.” Therefore it can be concluded with no doubt, “the Daily Offices have their roots in the custom of pious Jews in the time of our Lord, which was carried over into the devotion of early Christians (…) The Jewish

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24 Oesterley, 229.
25 Ibid.
26 Oesterley, 149.
custom continued in the Church even after its membership became predominantly Gentile.”

The use of the psalms in the Christian Church today is well-established.

**The amen** (congregational response)

The congregational response of ‘amen’ that concluded Jewish prayers played the same role in the early Christian worship and even in today’s liturgy. According to Oesterley, Saint Paul referred to the ‘amen’ and took for granted that it should be said, but he insisted on its intelligent utterance (1Cor 14:16; 2Cor 1:20). Thus, he who said ‘amen’ meant thereby that he associated himself with what had been said by another; in this context it is generally the leader of the prayer.

**Rites and Rituals / Art and Setting**

*The Use of Scriptures in Liturgy*

The Christian Liturgy of the Word has remained closely linked to the Jewish scriptural liturgy from the beginnings. Jesus himself and Saint Paul after him followed this liturgical model when participating in the synagogal worship (Lk 4:16-19; Acts 13:15ff). According to Cavaletti, Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* provides the first description of the most ancient Mass in Christian liturgical history. “And on the day which is called Sunday, there is an assembly in the same place of all who live in cities, or in country districts; and the records of the Apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read as long as we have time. Then the reader concludes and the President verbally instructs and exhorts us, to the imitation of these excellent things. Then, we all together rise and offer up our prayers…(I, 67).” From this account of Justin the Martyr, there is

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28 Oesterley, 147.
29 Cavaletti, 15.
clear evidence of the reading of Scripture and a sermon or homily following it as an integral part of the Christian divine worship.

Additionally, the pattern of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word in the nascent Church was comparable to the one of the synagogue. Bouyer believes,

It is the reality taken on by the Word of God in the services which seems to be the most striking similarity between the worship of the synagogue and that of the Christian Church. By this we mean that in both cases there was a very real feeling that the liturgical reading of the Bible was a true evocation of the realities it proclaimed; and there was clearly a very close correspondence between the actual way in which this idea was put into practice in the synagogue and in the church. Behind all this there lies a theology of worship, and of the liturgy, bound up with the pronouncement of the Word before the assembly of the People of God. This theology, in the Christian Church, certainly evolved from, and in relation to, all that went on in the synagogue.\footnote{Bouyer, Louis. “Jewish and Christian Liturgies”. Cross Currents. Summer (1963): 343.}

Furthermore, Oesterley provides another similarity in the Jewish and the early Christian worship. He declares: “It is evident that, in Christian as well as in Jewish worship, whatever passages were read, the choice was left to the reader, and the length of them was decided by him. The reader was not yet an official; in this, as in the matter of Scripture reading and the homily which followed, the usage of the Jewish Church is likely to have been that of the early Christian Church; any one could be called from among the assembled worshippers to read.”\footnote{Oesterley, 117-118. The book of Acts mentions the braking of bread on the first day of the week (Acts20. and the book of the Revelation also allude to the Sunday as the day of worship by writing on the Lord’s day (Rev 10:1)}Therefore, the early Christian form of worship was an unquestionable continuation of the Jewish model.

*Rites: Baptism, Death*

The Jewish prayer ‘Alenu’ that was said at the conclusion of the synagogue service was likely adopted in the early Church. In fact, “possibly the prayer of the conversion of all heathen nations contained in the latter portion of the ‘Alenu’, has some connection with the practice adopted by the Church of admitting proselytes at the end of
the service.” Relying on Harnack, Oesterley argues that before the Christian era, the Jewish synagogue had already drawn up a catechism for proselytes and made morality the condition of religion; it had already instituted a training for religion. Consequently, Christianity just took this up and deepened it. Moreover, the renunciation of Satan at Christian Baptism coincided precisely with the insistence on leading a moral life henceforth, which was a condition for Gentile proselytes converting to Judaism. In addition, the Jewish rite of admission of proselytes included circumcision and immersion. The Christian Rite of Baptism also included immersion: “this rite of immersion is important for an understanding of Christian Baptism, which according to the theology of Paul of Tarsus, is the death of ‘old self’ (palaios anthrōpos) and the emergence of ‘newness of life’ (kainotēti zoés).”

Furthermore, a comparison of the liturgical texts (qaddish – Memento) in Jewish and Christian traditions shows that both texts express and inspire sentiments of faith and abandonment to God when death occurs. “Thus in face of death Jewish and Christian believers feel themselves once more awakened to a personal conviction that they are rooted in the God of creation and redemption, the God of Covenant and salvation. Thanks to this conviction, the prayer of both becomes an appeal, the kaddish expressing it in the language of desire… and the Christian text in that of petition.”

Art and Setting

Some resemblances between Jewish and Christian liturgical art suggest a clear continuity between these traditions. For instance, “there is a remarkable similarity

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32 Ibid., 142.
33 Ibid.
34 Di Sante, 188.
between depictions of the temple to represent Jerusalem in Jewish art and depictions of
the tomb of Christ to represent Jerusalem in Christian art (…). Since the Jewish
representations are older than the Christian, the latter must have been imitations, using
the tomb of Christ as a new ark in Christian holy of Holies.” 36 Moreover, According to
Barker, there is no doubt that in the setting of the liturgy, many rituals and traditions of
the ancient holy of holies passed into the early Christian Church. The altar in the
Christian sanctuary corresponded to the ark with its two cherubim in the holy of holies,
beyond the veil in the desert tabernacle. In some Christian traditions, drawing a curtain to
screen the holy place is still part of the liturgy; for example, in Ethiopian churches there
is an ark in the sanctuary. 37

It can reasonably be affirmed that from Judaism to Christianity, progressively,
every church was seen as a new temple, and “the places where Christians worshipped
were consciously modeled… on the temple.” 38 The early Christians also imitated Jewish
architecture in their constructions. Bouyer argues that Christians were preceded by Jews
in using the Basilica-type of building. From the beginning the Christian Church, having
known the synagogue intimately and following its lead, was only the ‘house of God’
because it was the House of the People of God. In addition, in the ancient Syrian Church,
the ‘chair of Moses’ (chair of honor where the presiding rabbi sat in the synagogue)
simply became the bishop’s cathedra, and the seats of Jews presbyteroi (elders or council
community) those of the Christian priests. 39

36 Barker, Margaret, The Great Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy, New York: T&T Clark,
2003, 97.
37 Ibid., 95-96.
38 Ibid., 96.
39 Bouyer, 341.
Case Studies

The Jewish Background of the Lord’s Prayer

Two of the synoptic Gospels testify to the fact that the prayer of ‘Our Father’ is a model of prayer given by Jesus (Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4). The roots of this ancient and well-known prayer stretch deeply into Judaism. In fact, “Jesus’ great prayer, the Our Father, is first and foremost a Jewish expression of worship; every element of it finds a parallel in Jewish literature.” According to Di Sante, the structure of the ‘Our Father’ reflects the ideal structure of Jewish prayer as seen, for example, in the biblical prayer of King David (1Chron 29:10-20): an opening berakah, petitions, and final summarizing berakah. The connections between the Lord’s Prayer and Jewish prayers become even clearer in analyzing the several parts of the Our Father.

Di Sante suggests a detailed analysis of the Lord’s Prayer in comparison with Jewish prayers in the way that follows:

- ‘Our Father’: this title occurs both in the fifth and the sixth benediction [139] of the tefillah (amidah or Eighteen Benedictions). In addition, the name ‘Father’ is widely used in the liturgy of the New Year and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), where the phrases ‘Father of mercy’ and ‘O our Father’ occur with some frequency.

- ‘Who art in heaven’: this expression is likewise frequent in the Jewish liturgy. It occurs in the morning service (31) and in the treatise ’Abot, the oldest and the most important in the Mishnah (’Abot 5, 23).

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40 Fisher, 44.
41 Di Sante, 19-20.
‘Hallowed be thy name’: this expression reminds us of the *qaddish* (423), an old prayer used at the end of the reading and study of the Torah and, later on, in the synagogue service.

‘Thy kingdom come’: these words are likewise to be found in the *qaddish* (213).

‘Thy will be done’: these words occur in 1 Mac 3:59-60. They express an attitude of abandonment to God’s will; the same attitude finds expression in the prayer which Jews utter as they feel death drawing near (*qaddish* 1065).

‘Give us this day our daily bread’: this petition for bread is part of the ninth benediction of the *teffilah*; the same thought is expressed in Prov 30:8.

‘Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors’: the idea of forgiveness finds expression in the sixth benediction of the *teffilah* (139), even the thought in ‘as we forgive our debtors’ has its origin in the synagogue and in the Old Testament; we find it in the liturgy of *Yom Kippur* and in Sir 28:2. The same doctrine is found in the teachings of the majority of rabbis.

‘Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil’: this idea of deliverance or redemption is found in the seventh *teffilah* (141). 42

Thus, we can realize that the prayer of ‘Our Father’ is linked to the Jewish liturgy not only textually but even hermeneutically. In conclusion to the preceding analysis of the Lord’s Prayer, Di Sante affirms that “Jesus called on the same God as did his Jewish brothers and sisters and used the same turns of phrase as they did. His originality consisted in bringing to fulfillment what the biblical and liturgical texts proclaimed and expressed (see Mt 5:17: ‘Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I

42 Ibid., 20-23.
have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them’). The prayer which Jesus gives us is not opposed to the prayers of the Jews but brings them to fulfillment.”

In his article, “The background of Jesus’ Prayer”, Heinemann agrees with the idea of the Jewish rootedness of the Lord’s Prayer. However, rather than being rooted in fixed and statutory public prayer like the synagogue prayers, he argues that the Lord’s Prayer is modeled on typical Jewish private prayer. He declares, “There can be no doubt that the prayer of Jesus in Matt. 6:9 displays all of the characteristics of Jewish private prayer: it opens with an address employing one of the epithets used frequently in private petitions; it addresses God in the second person; its style is simple; it is quite brief, as are its component sentences; it lacks the form of ‘liturgical benediction’.” Whatever the case, whether rooted in public or private prayer, the point is that the Lord’s Prayer definitely has a Jewish background.

**Jewish practices and Christian Eucharist**

Based on the New Testament’s tradition, Jesus instituted the Eucharist when having a Last Supper with his apostles in the context of Passover (Mtt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20; Jn 13:1-20; 1Cor 11:23-26). Moreover, the Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts, “By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning.” Hence, Di Sante argues that the Jewish Passover is the most important context of all for an understanding of the Christian experience. Christianity followed Judaism in assigning a

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45 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1340.
central place to the meal and its celebration of the Eucharist; it even made bread and wine its basic symbols, but Christianity progressively removed the Eucharist from the setting of the family and located it in the framework of priesthood and temple.⁴⁶ There is no doubt that the early Christian Eucharist has a lot in common with the Jewish meal traditions, which have been given a new meaning by Jesus and the first generation of Christians.

In fact, based on Burns’ research, the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper follow the normal pattern of a Jewish ceremonial meal. The Eucharistic rite, which is the liturgical act of sacrifice for Christians, began as a sacred meal celebrated in a house at a family table. Christian celebrations of the Eucharist were the product of the combination of the blessings associated with Scripture readings in the synagogue and blessings with the ceremonial meal in the home.⁴⁷ Therefore, the Eucharist can only properly be understood through its Jewish ritual origin. According to Beckwith, the Passover meal was held on Saturday after nightfall in Semitic circles, and this day was regarded as the beginning of Sunday. Thus, we understand why Didache’14 speaks of the combined meal (Last Supper) as the first event of the Lord’s Day.⁴⁸ It is important to be aware of the fact that the rootedness of the Eucharist in the Jewish Passover meal does not deprive it of its originality and newness. In the former, “what was new was that in connection with bread and the third cup Jesus gave an entirely unconventional interpretation, concerned with his own sacrificial death, and in each case commanded that what he had said and done in relation to that particular item of the meal should be

⁴⁶ Di Sante, 141.
⁴⁷ Burns, 41.
⁴⁸ Beckwith, 29.
repeated Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor.1124f.

In spite of the number of parallels between the Jewish Passover meal and Christian Eucharist, this question remains a controversial issue. Barker, for example, finds the origins of the Christian Eucharist in the Jewish celebration of *Yom Kippur* or Day of Atonement. He argues that the original significance of the Day of Atonement for Jews was precisely the restoration of creation, the renewal of the eternal covenant. As a result, “one root of the Eucharist must lie in the Day of Atonement, when the high priest, who was the LORD, entered ‘heaven’ carrying blood which represented the life of the LORD. It was sprinkled on the ark, the ‘throne’, and then brought out into the visible world to renew the eternal covenant and restore creation (...) The Day of Atonement is the only possible source of the ‘both high priest and victim’ belief associated with the Eucharist.”

Moreover, Barker believes that another root of the Eucharist must lie in the high priest ritual, “eating the bread of the presence” which was placed in the temple each Sabbath. The bread of the temple was the eternal covenant (Lev 24:8) and the command that Aaron and his sons had to eat it was an eternal statute (Lev 29:9). The Sabbath itself was described as an eternal covenant marking the completion of the creation. In addition, a recurring theme in texts associated with the Eucharist is fear and awe, the fear which the high priest felt as he entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. Given the fact that Jesus represented the fulfillment of the promises of God, establishing a new covenant in his sacrifice for human salvation, it can be asserted that both the Jewish celebration of Passover and Yom Kippur constitute valuable means to understand the Christian Eucharist.

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49 Beckwith, 28.
50 Barker, 86.
51 Barker, 87-100.
Jewish Sabbath and Christian Sunday

According to the New Testament, Jesus and his disciples were devout Jews who took into consideration the Sabbath by participating in the synagogue worship (Mk 1:21; Lk 3:10; Jn 6:59). After the resurrection of Jesus, the early Jewish Christians continued to observe the Sabbath, but they used the opportunity to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ in the synagogues (Act 13: 14-16. 44; 17:1-3). They also felt the need to gather on Sunday. In fact, at a first look, Sunday seems to have developed as a sequel and conclusion of Sabbath synagogue worship. At the close of the synagogue (…) the faithful gathered to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice. If this is so, the continuity of liturgical life between synagogue and Church is clear: the celebration of the sacrifice by which salvation is accomplished became the fulfillment of the liturgy in which salvation is announced. The early Jewish Christians met on the first day of the week (Sunday) to worship, to break bread together (Acts 20:7), and collect offerings to help the poor members of the community (1Cor 16: 2).

Nevertheless, while the early Jewish Christians continued to observe the Sabbath, the Gentile Christians were free to disregard this obligation (Gal 2: 11-14; 4: 8-11; 5:1; Col 2: 16-19;).

As the Gentile Christian community grew and the Jewish Christian community diminished in size and in influence, the early Church more and more established Sunday, the first day of the week, as primary day to gather for worship. For Christians, each Sunday commemorated the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week and could be celebrated as ‘a little Easter’. The beginning day of the new week came to represent ‘the eighth day of creation’ and the dawn of a new creation in light of Jesus rising from the dead.52

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When looking at this question deeply, we can realize that the connection between Sabbath and Sunday was more historical and accidental than doctrinal. According to Nocent, the Sunday celebration has no link with the biblical theology of rest associated with the Sabbath. This was just an accidental association dating from 321 when the emperor Constantine ordained that Sunday should be a day of rest from work for all. From that time, a theology of rest according to the Bible and to Judaism was superimposed on the celebration of Sunday. As a result, “whereas before the Sabbath and Sunday had been separate and distinct, the Sunday law of 321 merged them together as one concept. For Constantinian Christendom, Sunday took over as the Sabbath.”

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to examine the Jewish background of Christian liturgy. The investigation leads to the conclusion that Christian liturgy unquestionably evolved from Jewish worship and it is still marked by its origin. Christians and Jews share common liturgical origins as attested in the Old Testament.

The first Christian communities were deeply indebted to the Jewish style of worship. Whether considering the experience of worship of Jesus and his apostles, or the pattern of the Christian Liturgy of the Word, or the celebration of the Eucharist (central action of Christian worship), or the Rites and Rituals in the Church, or even the setting of the place of worship, they are all unquestionably influenced by Jewish practice.

In addition, numerous details on prayer forms exemplify the Christian Church’s continuing relationship with the Jewish people. The Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office)

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54 Bechellet, 25.
and the formulas of many Christians’ most memorable prayers, such as the ‘Our Father’, obviously resonate with rabbinic Judaism.

It is worth mentioning, however, that some aspects of the Jewish liturgical influence were limited in time to the Christian antiquity. Moreover, the Jewish rootedness of Christian liturgy does not account for Christianity’s originality. Furthermore, Jewish worship was not the only origin of Christian worship. Many other cultures shaped Christian liturgy from the beginning. Further research could consider, for example, the Hellenistic and the Roman influence on the Christian liturgy in antiquity.
CHAPTER TWO: LITURGY AND CULTURE

Introduction

The celebration of liturgy is one of the most essential experiences of the faith. And every religious community has its own symbolic form for expressing its faith in worship. The fact that Christian liturgy is always celebrated in a specific context draws attention to the dynamics between liturgy and each culture; moreover the relationship between liturgy and local cultures can simply be broadened to include the relationship of the Church to the world. In fact, throughout the history of Christianity, the special ways in which the life of faith is practiced has been maintained by numerous adaptations to particular cultural settings.

For centuries, as Dix asserts, the Christian liturgy and the Eucharistic celebration in particular “has adapted itself perpetually with a most delicate adjustment to the practical conditions and racial temperaments and special gifts of a multitude of particular churches and peoples and generations, while maintaining in essence an unchanged rigid framework.”\(^5\) The Church has always been committed to the inculturation of public worship for the good of the people of God.

In spite of certain resistance felt here and there to the idea of liturgical inculturation, convincing evidence attests to the fact that liturgical inculturation is a somehow inherent and necessary process to keep alive the celebration of the faith within the Catholic Church as this faith community continues to spreads around the world.

The Greco – Roman Shape of the Church’s Liturgy

Inculuration has always been a preoccupation of Christianity from its very beginning as it attempted to spread out from its Jewish matrix. In search of adherents, Christianity moved forth from its foundation in Palestine into the vast Roman empire of pagan antiquity. As a result, the liturgical development of the early Church was doubtlessly influenced by its Hellenistic environment. Many liturgical features attest to the presence of Hellenistic cultural forms in the Christian Church.

The Greek Influence

According to Baumstark, under the Hellenistic influence, it became quite common to use apophatic descriptors in the liturgical language to qualify the divine essence. Some of the terms used for addressing God were immortal, infinite, inexpressible, incomprehensible, etc. In addition, there was a form of prayer of the faithful that entailed having the leader of the assembly recite specific petitions, while the congregation answers responsively with an invariable exclamation. Baumstark believes that the fact that this type of prayer was prevalent in liturgies everywhere (Litany of the Saints in the West and rite of passages in the liturgy of the East) leaves no room for doubting its place among the oldest inventory of liturgical form. “The ritual of the synagogue offers nothing to serve for its pattern. However, now and again in the Metamorphosis, a novel by Apuleius of Madaura (ca. 124-after 170), we learn that this kind of responsive intercessory prayer was practiced in the Mysteries of Isis in just the

56 It is noteworthy that in the Western part of the Roman Empire up to the third century, the majority of Christians were Greeks. During this period Christianity was chiefly propagated in the Greek colonies, and the divine services, therefore, took on a Greek tone.

same way as found in later Christianity. Indeed, as early as the beginning of the second century before Christ, an inscription at Magnesia on the Meander attests to its use in the cult of Zeus Sosipolis.”\(^{58}\) The Christian liturgy was also overlaid with expressions from the ecological pantheism and the stoicism of Greek philosophy.

Moreover, pagan mystery rites of antiquity influenced the rites and the language of Christian initiation. Even though the pagan mysteries did not affect Christian worship in its inception, Jungmann thinks they at least provided a providential preparation for the sacramental idea presented by Christianity. He declares that: “While it is true that the sacraments were instituted by Christ and determined in all essentials by Him, yet paganism was already prepared to some extent to accept them because in the mysteries paganism already possessed something that was of the same *typus* (or the same [ethos]) as the sacramental system (...) And later, when Christianity entered into the sphere of Hellenistic culture, it made use of the technical terms of mystery religions in order to introduce the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, to the heathen world.”\(^{59}\)

Baumstark states that the rites initiating persons in Christian mysteries resembled the ritual forms in the sacred services of non-Christian cults. For example, the simple baptism by immersion, which Philip performed for the treasurer of the Ethiopian queen was simply water found along the way, as described in Acts 8: 26-40; progressively the rite became surrounded by an ever richer ceremonial apparatus, both the prebaptismal rites preparing for baptism and the postbaptismal elaborating it. And so, initiatory

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., 75-76.

\(^{59}\) Jungmann, 153. The mysteries were secret rites performed only by a small group of initiates, and held in honor of a deity, chiefly an underworld divinity who was believed to take charge of souls after death. These rites existed among the ancient Greeks and afterwards among the Romans as well.
exorcism, the laying on of hands, and the anointing by oil undeniably represent a common heritage from initiation services of the mysteries.\textsuperscript{60}

In his article on liturgical inculturation, Chupungco makes a suggestive comment on the origin of the rite of anointing of neophytes. He writes: “Baptismal anointing is nowhere to be found in the New Testament. In fact, it is not mentioned even by patristic literature prior to Tertullian. We know that the practice was observed in certain mystery rites, and so it is possible that Christians borrowed it from them. But what makes the practice Christian is the meaning that was attached to it: the priesthood of the baptized.”\textsuperscript{61} Many other elements of the pagan culture were adopted in Christian baptism at the beginning, but they fell out of use later. The ancient baptismal ritual included a practice that consisted of offering a cup of milk and honey to the neophytes, and then washing their feet as they ascended from the baptismal pool. In this regard, Baumstark attests that

At one time, the celebration for the baptism of an adult concluded with the baptized participating in the Eucharist for the first time. After being administered Holy Communion under the forms of bread and wine, the newly baptized was customarily offered a cup containing a mixture of milk and honey … one finds explicit confirmation that a cup was similarly administered in the mysteries of Attis. It is at least highly probable that it was done by the cult of Dionysius in southern Italy as early as the fourth to third century before Christ and perhaps was not unknown in the Egyptian religion of Isis as well.\textsuperscript{62}

Just like the baptismal rite, Hellenism influenced the outer expressions of the celebration of the Eucharist. In effect, “under the influence of ideas prevalent in the mysteries, this composite service was shaped into a kind of coherent drama, exercising a powerful hold on the hearts and imaginations of those participating.”\textsuperscript{63} Although Christianity was in certain important respects exclusivist and refrained from what other

\textsuperscript{60} Baumstark, 76.
\textsuperscript{62} Baumstark, 76-77.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 77.
religions were doing, Bradshaw argues that it did not exist in a vacuum, insulated from the language, images, and practices of the religious and practices around it. Christians, albeit often quite unconsciously, could not help but be affected by its contemporaries and have the words and action of its worship shaped by the society in which they lived. As far as the Eucharist is concerned, the question of the origin of the pattern of its celebration has not yet found a unanimous answer.

From the parallels between the Jewish last supper and Christian Eucharist, many prominent scholars have concluded that the early Christian Eucharist could be traced back largely to the Jewish meal tradition. However, based on Rouwhorst’s research, in the past two decades, this approach has been increasingly criticized by several scholars, who have explored new paths by drawing attention to the similarities between the early Christian Eucharist and Greco-Roman banquets. He posits that “the latter, often designated as symposia, were common phenomenon in the Mediterranean world; they cut across religious boundaries (Jews, Greeks, and Romans) and usually followed a general pattern involving a number of customs and rituals. It has been proposed that the Christian Eucharist originated and developed as a variety of this symposium.”

McGowan, for instance, argues that the significance of a Eucharistic meal is not limited to its apparently genetic connections with the Last Supper. Because of that, no symbolic meal can escape comparison with the day-to-day meals of the community which celebrates it; he also

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contends that the Eucharistic meal of the early Christians were not only liturgical or sacral.\textsuperscript{66} In one of his most recent volumes on Christian worship, McGowan reaffirms that the Christian Eucharist developed from ancient banquets that were an integral part of Greco-Roman (including Jewish) sacrifices. He underscores that: “the first Christians remembered not just the last but many meals of Jesus as models for their own eating. These meals also belonged to a wider cultural tradition of shared eating and drinking, within which the emerging Eucharistic meal tradition took its place and claimed its significance.”\textsuperscript{67} In addition, the elements used in Jewish meals were reserved not only for Jewish tradition; the normative pattern of bread and wine, central to the early Christian communal meals, also reflected food and drink of the Greco-Roman antiquity. Therefore, even though “Jesus’ own eating, including his Last Supper, involved sensibilities and rituals specific to Jewish tradition, Jewish dining, including of course observance of the Mosaic dietary laws, should, however, be understood as one part of an ancient Mediterranean banqueting tradition rather than as a totally separate reality.”\textsuperscript{68}

Nevertheless, in a critical assessment of the two theories regarding the pre-Christian origin of the Eucharist, Rouwhorst concludes that both theories have their validity and their limitations. They both shed light on important aspects of the development of early Christian meal practices and early Christian Eucharist in particular. Consequently, the two theories are not mutually exclusive, but rather complement each other. “Given the fact that they are primarily concerned with early Christian rituals upon pre-Christian tradition, whether Jewish, Greek or Roman, it is easy to overlook

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specifically Christian dimensions. It is therefore important to bear in mind that practices are never simply copied, but rather appropriated and transformed. Once a particular tradition has been transmitted from one community to another, it will be restructured and adapted.\textsuperscript{69} The point is that Christian Eucharist as an essential part of the whole worship developed while borrowing from the cultural elements of its environment.

Hellenistic religiosity and its mystery cults not only stimulated the development of Christian liturgy in the sacrament of Baptism and the Eucharist, but also “the ancient bridal crown, intended originally to ward off demonic powers, has assumed a commanding place in the marriage rituals of all the oriental churches. The burial ceremony of the Greek liturgy offers another example. The final embrace with which the ‘brothers’ of the deceased bid farewell originated in the ancient customs surrounding the practice of laying the dead out in state … So also with the melancholy songs that accompany this ceremony.”\textsuperscript{70} Additionally, Baumstark argues that the liturgical emphasis upon the character of God and Christ as ‘Savior’ or ‘Redeemer’ cannot be understood without tying it to the cult of Asclepius (a Greek hero and god of healing widely worshiped before and after the birth of Christ), which was particularly popular, and other divine ‘saviors’ of the Mediterranean world.\textsuperscript{71} He also believes that both the loving attentiveness that the intercessions of the liturgy show for the sick as well as a hope for ‘healing’ (body and soul) that is tied to consuming the Eucharist point in the same direction. “In contrast to the pagan gods of healing, Christians experienced the Lord in the liturgy as both the exalted one and the true doctor of all human weakness, just as of

\textsuperscript{69} Rouwhorst, 305.
\textsuperscript{70} Baumstark, 79-80.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 80.
old he – whom people supposed to be the son of a carpenter in Nazareth – providing comfort as he walked the roads of Galilee and Judea.”

Between the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century (before Constantine’s time), Christians suffered a difficult and bloody persecution as a result of their refusal to participate in the imperial cult and the cult of the sun. Possessing a very clear sense of divine worship and opposed to any kind of idolatry, “the Christians refused to drop even a single grain of incense on the burning coal in front of emperor’s statue; they refused to garland the emperor’s image with flowers; they refused, too, the Greek … prostration in front of the emperor’s picture.” According to Baumstark, many concepts accrued to the liturgy that exhibited the outstanding opposition to that pagan worship. For example, the concept of the kingship of Christ, exalted to rule over all, and the idea of him being the true, spiritual sun, the sun of righteousness arose from the Christians’ opposition to pagan worship. Even the response *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy), along with its three-fold repetition, found its way into the Christian liturgy from the cult of sun. It should be remembered here that the designation ‘Lord’ in those days by right belonged exclusively to the emperor and the sun.

Furthermore, the idea of Christ as spiritual sun was expressed most remarkably in the creation of the feast of Christmas. Indeed Christmas is the most famous example that connects the practices of paganism to the Christian liturgical calendar. Based on Jugmann’s research, in the time of Hellenism, birthday feasts were customarily celebrated, namely, birthdays of princes and especially of the Roman emperors, and certainly, also, of famous personalities. So it was quite natural that Christians should

72 Ibid., 81.
73 Jungmann, 130.
74 Baumstark, 81-82. *The Christe eleison* might have been a later addition.
solemnly celebrate the birthday of their Lord and their king. And since the actual birthday was unknown, the 25th of December was chosen. In those days in Rome this day was a very important one as it was the pagan birthday of the invincible sun (*dies natalies solis invicti*) and the feast was celebrated with splendor.\(^{75}\) The feast of Christ’s birth, therefore, fittingly provided the Christmas antithesis to the pagan feast of the sun.

Nevertheless, there is no agreement among scholars on the question of the origin of Christmas. McGowan argues that, even though some interest in the sun as a divinity grew through the same period that Christianity appeared, there is no evidence for an existing major festival that Christians could simply borrow or ‘baptize’.\(^{76}\) In effect, the debate about the origin about the origin of Christmas presents a number of theories. Beside the aforementioned historical theory (labeled HRT= History of Religion Theory), there is another theory known as the “Calculation Theory” (CT). According to Nothaft, the best-developed elaboration CT to have been presented thus far is due to Thomas J. Talley and his 1986-monograph *Origins of the Liturgical Year* … Talley essentially holds that Christmas on December 25 was derived from the day of Christ’s Passion, for which commemorative dates in the Julian calendar had already been established in the late-second or early-third centuries. Assuming that Christ spent a perfect number of years in the flesh, Christian scholars established a chronological parallelism between the conception in Mary’s womb (annunciation) and his death on the cross, which were both assigned to March 25, the Roman date of the vernal equinox. In a further step, they added a schematically rounded number of nine months o the date of Jesus’ conception to arrive to his birth on the day of winter solstice, December 25.\(^{77}\)

Nothaft affirms that the influence of the Calculation Theory was quite limited. He also reports Förster Hans’ theory, which stands as an alternative to both CT and HRT. This third theory stipulates that “the roots of Christmas can be found in fourth-century Palestine, where a new trend of Holy Land pilgrimages created a

\(^{75}\) Jungmann, 147.
\(^{77}\) Nothaft, C.P.R., “The Origins of the Christmas Date: Some Recent Trends in Historical Research”, in *Church History* 81:4 (December 2012), 904.
‘historicizing’ tendency to celebrate the main christological feasts at the correct place and at the appropriate time.”

Christian culture and pagan culture cannot simply be considered so completely antagonistic to one another as to make any compromises impossible. Baumstark draws attention to the similarity of an architectural feature of the Greek amphitheater, the wall of stage or façade, and the iconostasis (screen of icons) found at the sanctuary of eastern churches. He remarks that an undeniable relationship existed between the theater stage wall of antiquity and that closing of the altar room, which thereby became mysteriously hidden from the assembly’s view; it was through the doors of this enclosing wall that the processions of the liturgical drama of the East moved. Similarly, concerning the architectural influence of pagan culture on the Church’s liturgy, Jungmann asserts that: “long before the Christian epoch, various pagan sects and associations had adopted the basilica type of building to worship. Christianity thus continued an existing tradition, accommodating it to the requirements of its liturgy.” Pre-Christiant forms of art were noticed in the oldest ecclesiastic art, namely on the catacombs. The Christian Church did not merely bow to the forces of paganism, but in her worship she assimilated what she could of pagan culture by which she was surrounded. The liturgy of the Church

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78 Ibid., 909. At that time, as Nathaft explains, the annual celebration of Christ’s birth at the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was of a particular concern. This celebration was later incorporated into liturgies of other churches as a result of pilgrims bringing the practices they witnessed in the Holy Land back to their communities. Since it is known that nativity celebrations in Jerusalem and Bethlehem took place on January 6 until the sixth century, Förster naturally assumes that this was the original Christmas date, which was then exported to Rome and changed to December 25 under the influence of the solstice.

79 Baumstark, 77. Baumstark refers here to the screen of icons, pierced by three doors, which separates the sanctuary from nave in the churches of the East. This iconostasis is an imitation of the wall of stage in the Greek amphitheater that was also pierced by three doors used by the actors for entry and exit.

80 Jungmann, 123.
integrated the pagan elements (social forms, civic ceremonials, national usages, artistic practices) in order to sanctify them.

In addition, the Christian liturgical kiss derived from the culture of pagan antiquity. According to Jungmann, when someone was initiated into a given fraternity or a society, it was the kiss which formed the sign of such an initiation. The Christian did likewise; the initiation into Christian community took place through baptism; immediately afterwards when the bishop confirmed the neophyte, he gave him a kiss. After that he was allowed to pass down to the faithful in the church, and they, too, greeted him with a kiss. The other forms of liturgical kiss, like the priest’s kissing the altar at the beginning and at the end of the Mass have their roots in ancient customs, whereby the pagans, too, used to greet their altar by a kiss. Likewise, the devotional kissing of holy objects such as the cross and the book of the Gospels as a sign of veneration is a heritage of an antique custom. In fact, “an idol, too, was revered by kissing it or blowing a kiss to it, as Italians are still accustomed to ‘kiss’ a statute by putting their hand to their mouth and then extending it in the direction of the object.”

Similarly, Jungmann adds that the dismissal (Ite missa est) at the end of liturgical celebrations is also a custom that developed from ancient Roman practices. It is not a specifically religious formula, but one which could be employed just as well at the end of a profane assembly. This process of cultural dialogue continued through the Constantinian era.

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81 Ibid., 128.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 129.
Impact of Roman Culture

It is worthwhile to remember that Christianity was born in the Roman Empire, and the Greco-Roman milieu was the background of the first Christians, and “obviously the first Christian liturgical elements have certain things in common with the Greek culture (language, literature, ideas), and also with the Roman customs (buildings, court ceremonies, etc).”84 In particular, as the Church came to enjoy the relationship with Rome, following the conversion to Christianity of the emperor Constantine (313 AD), Christianity became a legitimate and respectable religion. From the beginning of the reign of Constantine and under his patronage, “both architecture and liturgy shifted into new, public, imperial mode colored by lavish court ceremonials and shaped by the new and exhilarating elevation of the Church to the realm of power.”85 Up to this point, Christian worship was made up mostly of Jewish and Greek elements. But progressively, Latin elements grew in strength. As Latin language and literature became the normal vehicle of civilization for centuries, transmitting the ancient cultural heritage, it also became the vehicle for the Christian message.

Additionally, together with the language, Christian liturgy surely adopted much from the Roman treasury of thought. In effect, “in passing on to Latin liturgy, the Romans were not satisfied merely to translate older Greek prayers: the genius of the Latin language and the Roman’s particular intellectual character were allowed to make their own contribution.”86 For example, the Roman rite inherited from the Roman customs the

86 Jungmann, 126- 127.
juridical way of thinking as well as the classical liturgy known to be noble, dignified, and cultured. Chupungco describes the liturgy of Roman people as a perfect example of an inculturated liturgy. The language and ritual expressions of this liturgy absorbed the cultural traits of classical Rome. The cultural genius of their liturgy was marked by noble simplicity, brevity, sobriety, and practicality. The splendor taken from the imperial court was confined mostly to the entrance rite. Moreover, in the social organization of his empire, Constantine made attendance at Sunday liturgy significantly easier for Christians. The emperor’s law of 321 declared ‘the venerable day of sun’ to be a day of rest for all. As time went on, rest from work became the focal point of sanctification of Sunday. From the hidden services in domestic settings, the liturgy was now celebrated in magnificent basilicas especially in cities, and the change of venue inevitably led to the development of a more solemn liturgy.

Furthermore, the ceremonial of the imperial court significantly influenced the Church liturgy. Given the fact that bishops were now treated as equals of the highest officials of the empire, Adam affirms that: “they were now accompanied at their solemn entry into their basilicas by ministers carrying lights and incense and were conducted to a throne. Bows and the proskynesis (prostration with forehead touching the floor) were the signs of reverence given to them as to the emperor himself and his highest officials. The high social status of bishops and their clergy also led to the wearing of festive garb with special insignia, such as stole, pallium, and maniple; it was from this garb that later liturgical vestments developed.” The signs of this imperial influence are still evident in

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87 Chupungco, 357-359. It was after the fourth century that the ritual shape of the liturgy began to be increasingly bound up with the culture of the period.
the liturgical vestments of clergy today, especially the Pope and bishops. Further, Jungmann adds that the fact of having two deacons stand next to the pope and bishops when they are celebrating either a Solemn Papal Mass (for the Pope) or a Pontifical High Mass (for bishops) goes back to the ceremonial of the imperial court. So does the use of lights (candles) and incense during liturgical processions. Thus a segment of the ceremonial has become a religious ceremony of the Christian liturgy.\(^89\)

One of the most visible influences of Roman culture on Christian liturgy may be in the field of architectural engineering. Actually, with the aid of the emperor and members of his family, several Christian churches were built following the prototypical plan of Roman secular basilicas.\(^90\) Since the emperor himself was in the forefront of the promotion of Christianity and Christian worship, Jungmann says that he and his family erected great buildings for worship in the Holy Land – at Jerusalem and Bethlehem – as well as in Constantinople and especially in Rome. Certainly it was the bishop and the Church authorities who gave the directives for the building of churches, but it was the lay architect’s concept of his art and the wealthy benefactor’s love of pomp that were to prevail in the actual construction.\(^91\) As a result, these buildings were generally colossal and magnificent structures, churches worthy of an emperor.

Nevertheless, not all the cultural features of the Roman milieu were well received in the Christian liturgy. Adam points out that while the Church was open to an extensive display of the splendor derived from other areas of public life, she tended to reject the rich musical culture of antiquity. The chief reason for this was probably the fact that

\(^89\) Jungmann, 133.
\(^90\) The secular basilica was an all-purpose structure, meeting a variety of needs ranging from markets and assembly places to low courts and imperial reception halls complete with a throne.
\(^91\) Ibid., 123.
musical instruments played a significant role in the many varieties of pagan sacrifice, where their use was regarded as part of the worship.\textsuperscript{92} In fact “according to the concepts of antiquity, music was part of each sacrifice, even when only incense or libation were offered. Flutes, various stringed instruments, noisy kettle-drums, trumpets, and little bells, the so-called \textit{sistrum}, were employed. The music was meant to ward off the demons and to invite the coming of the gods.”\textsuperscript{93} Not all bishops were equally opposed to music though; a compromise was progressively made so as to allow some simple melodies. In the dialogue with secular culture, the Church also had to deal with the challenge of materialism and secularism by resisting the gain of material splendor which would threaten the spiritual values that marked her identity.

The relation between Christian liturgy and secular culture of the Constantinian age could really be described as one of inculturation. Although the Church wanted to preserve in her liturgy an attitude of great reserve towards pagan culture, she took from the surrounding world many elements that were noble, beautiful, significant, and belonged simply to the general culture of the people. The process of liturgical inculturation continued until the centralization and standardization in the Middle Ages. With the passage of time, the Church continued to incarnate in new and varying contexts, while adapting her liturgy to the world’s manifold cultures.\textsuperscript{94} Unfortunately, because of

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\item \textsuperscript{92} Adam, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Jungmann, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Based on Chupungco’s research, during the Franco-Germanic period (590 – 1073), for example, the Western Church renewed its liturgical life and added to it the following: the families of sacramentaries attributed to Leo the Great, Gelasius, and Gregory the Great; the lyrics of the “\textit{Veni Creator}” and “\textit{Victimae Paschali}”; devotion to the saints, liturgical drama, and verbal flourishes in prayer; the procession with palms on palm Sunday, footwashing on Holy Thursday, the veneration of the cross on Good Friday; the blessing of the new fire, the greeting of the Light of Christ, the singing of the “\textit{Exultet}”, the blessing of the baptismal water at the Easter Virgil; Romanesque churches and their rites of dedication (see Chupungco, Anscar, J., \textit{Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy}, New York: Paulist Press, 1982, 27-29). Simultaneously, the
\end{itemize}
abuses and unregulated practices in the Middle Ages, there arose a call for strict uniformity starting with Pope Gregory VII (1073 – 1085). The Tridentine reform accentuated the standardization of the Roman rite (with the Latin Mass) by fostering a heightened rubrical approach of the liturgy. It was not until the Second Vatican Council that doors were officially reopened for liturgical inculturation.

**Magisterial Pronouncement on Inculturation**

The Council of Trent (1540-1563) as a whole led the Church in the direction of consolidation and standardization. Consequently, in the Church of the West the rites of the liturgy were kept in Latin and made uniform. The free development of the liturgy in local churches was greatly curtailed, and the cultural adaptation observed in the past came to a virtual standstill. Even “with the First Vatican Council (1869 – 1870), we see not interaction between Church and culture, but rather withdrawal and retrenchment on the part of the Church. Fear for modern ideas, new liberal attitudes, and influence of the enlightenment led the Catholic Church toward centralization and further standardization.”

The relation of liturgy to culture was part of the discussions at the Second Vatican Council. The Sacred Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) promulgated by Vatican II enshrined the *Magna Carta* of liturgical inculturation in the Roman Catholic Church. This constitution recommended that liturgy be adapted to the particular character and tradition of peoples, and that their cultural heritage be taken into account in this delicate process.

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Eastern Church reaped the bounty of the greatness of Cyril and Methodius in their effort to adapt the Byzantine liturgy to the culture and language of the Slavic people.

Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Instructions for Its Right Implementation

According to Sacrosanctum Concilium, salient reforms such as active participation, use of the vernacular, and frequent references to socio-cultural situations are indeed part of a bigger agenda to inculturate the Roman liturgy. Paragraphs 37-40 represent the core section of the document whereby the council’s fathers set a far-reaching course for liturgical inculturation: “Even in the liturgy the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity…rather, the Church respects and fosters the genius and talents of various races and peoples. The Church … preserves intact the elements of these people’s way of life … and admits such elements into the liturgy itself, provided they are in keeping with the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy … Provisions should be made … for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples … In some places and circumstances … even more adaptation of the liturgy is needed.”96

These four paragraphs of Sacrosanctum Concilium form the basis for any discussion of liturgical inculturation in Church. However, they should be interpreted in the light of principles stipulated in other sections of the constitution, namely, 1) the liturgy is made up of immutable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change; 2) regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, on the apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the bishop; 3) in order that sound tradition may be preserved while yet allowing possibilities for legitimate development, a thorough investigation (theological, historical, and pastoral) of each part of the liturgy should be done first; and 4) innovations should not be made unless the good of the Church

96 Sacrosanctum Concilium 37-40.
genuinely and certainly requires them, and new forms should grow organically out of those already existing.\textsuperscript{97}

In addition, number 63b of the liturgical constitution made rooms and included norms for cultural adaptations of various sacramental rites: “In harmony with the new edition of the Roman rite, particular rituals shall be prepared without delay by competent territorial ecclesiastical authority.”\textsuperscript{98} By this provision of \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium}, the Church was acknowledging and emphasizing the importance of the relation between the celebration of the liturgical rite and local culture. Following the prescriptions of \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium} 37-40 and 63b, wherein the background for liturgical adaptation is established, certain sacraments and sacramentals had their rites revised immediately during the years after the council. For instance, the rites of ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops, the rite of marriage, and the rite of funerals were all modified. These rites include and suggest some areas where adaptations could be made according to the local customs, traditions, and cultures of the people. Referring to the French liturgist P.-M. Gy, Martin notices that the liturgical constitution contains within itself a dual intentionality: “a) on the one hand, to conserve and honor the spiritual and cultural heritage of the West which, up to now, had been preserved in the Roman liturgy; and b) to make the liturgy an expression of the active, contemporary relationship between the God being worshipped and the people of God doing the worshipping.”\textsuperscript{99} Moreover, several other documents of Vatican II expressed the dignity of the variety of cultures present in the Church

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 21-23.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 63b.
throughout the world. Therefore, there is no overarching and superior culture that transcends and includes all the others at the same time.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* introduced key terminology (the concept of adaptation), which will occur again in the first three instructions on its proper implementation. The instructions in question are: *Inter Oecumenici* (1964), *Tres Abhinc Annos* (1967), and *Liturigicae Instaurationes* (1970). Martin states that “these documents represent the initial steps taken in the reform and revision of the rites of the Roman Catholic Church and also serve as the genetic origins of the *Fourth Instruction*...[They] laid the groundwork for subsequent liturgical inculturation.”

101 The First Instruction prescribes and allows, as Martin comments, the use of vernacular under special circumstances (e.g., when ministering for immigrants). It reaffirms what had been stated several times in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, namely, that the liturgy is first and foremost a full, conscious, and active celebration of the local community’s vibrant faith. The liturgical celebration, whether an action of the Church or of the assembly of the faithful, should be done in such a way that the ritual is seen as a living reality for living people. Number 57 allows certain parts of the Mass, whether recited or sung, to be in the vernacular.

102 The Second Instruction brought about some adaptations in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. The changes were precisely in posture, gesture, and language. But for Martin, what is of interest and importance to the present study is the extension of the permission to use the

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100 See for example: *Lumen Gentium* 13; *Gaudium et Spes* 44, 53-54; *Ad Gentes*, 21-22; *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 2-6.
101 Martin, 16.
102 Martin, 20. The parts of the Mass where the vernacular was permitted were: the proclamation of the lessons, epistle, and Gospel; the universal prayer or prayer of the faithful; as befits the chants of the place, the chants of the Ordinary of the Mass; namely, the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, offertory, and the *Credo*, *Sanctus-Benedictus*, and the *Agnus Dei*, as well as the Introit, Offertory, and Communion antiphons and chants between the readings and the acclamations, greetings, and dialogue formularies, the *Ecce Agnus Dei, Domine non sum dings*, *Corpus Christi* at the communion of the faithful, and the Lord’s prayer with its introduction and embolism.
vernacular, which included, henceforth, the Canon of the Mass, all the rites of Holy Orders, and the readings of the Divine Office, even in the choral recitation. Three years after the Second Instruction, a third one was issued. According to Martin, “the overall import of this third instruction was one of curbing experimentation and correcting abuses and excesses.” In fact, from the publication of Sacrosanctum Concilium to the publication of the Third Instruction for its good implementation, many abuses had arisen in the liturgy. Consequently, this Third Instruction came out as a means of imposing order once again on the liturgical reform of the post-conciliar period. Before a Fourth Instruction on the orderly carrying out of the constitution on the liturgy, the period of the papacy Jean Paul II had shed more light on the theme of inculturation in the Church.

**John Paul II and Inculturation / The Fourth Instruction**

An attentive reading of certain writings of John Paul II clearly reveals his thoughts about the process of inculturation. The concept of “inculturation” is found for the first time in an official Church document in John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae issued in 1979. Further, when describing the work of evangelization in his Encyclical Letter Slavorum Apostoli (1985), John Paul II used the terminology of inculturation, which he defined as the double task of “inserting the Gospel into autochthonous human culture and, at the same time, bringing human culture into the life of the Church.” In the same year (December 1985), an extraordinary synod of bishops reflected on the meaning, significance, and implementation of the Second Vatican Council. In its concluding declaration, that is, its message to the people of God,

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103 Ibid., 25.
104 Ibid., 34.
105 Catechesi Tradendae, 53.
106 Slavorum Apostoli, 21.
the synod spoke of inculturation as follows: “Since the Church is a communion, which is present throughout the world and joins diversity and unity, it takes up whatever it finds positive in all cultures. Inculturation, however, is different from mere external adaptation, as it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures.”

At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter (*Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, 1989) in which he mentioned some difficulties and expressed some concerns about the process of liturgical reform since the promulgation of the liturgical constitution. The fifth section of this document contains significant guidelines for adaptation of the liturgy and ultimately for liturgical inculturation. Specifically, number sixteen enunciates both the general purpose and some specific principles for the accommodation of the liturgy to various cultures. In fact, John Paul II reminded the Church of something already declared in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: he stated that the liturgy of the Church contains an immutable core and parts which can change, and that the work of inserting the liturgy into cultures must take place within the Roman rite. Additionally, the pope affirmed that on the one hand the Church has to adjust to the cultures of recently evangelized peoples those parts of the liturgy that can be changed, but on the other hand he declared that cultural adaptation requires a conversion of hearts, and if necessary, even a cessation of the practice of some ancestral customs that are incompatible with the Catholic faith. Martin asserts that this apostolic

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108 *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, 16.
letter occupies an important place in the genesis of the term inculturation in papal and magisterial documents and, by extension, in the genesis of the Fourth Instruction.\textsuperscript{109}

Just one year after \textit{Vicesimus Quintus Annum}, John Paul II issued an Encyclical on the missionary activity of the Church (\textit{Redemptoris Missio}, 1990). In chapter five, he addresses the context and content of the task of inculturation. According to the pope, the process of inculturation is not a matter of merely external adaptation, “for inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity, and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”\textsuperscript{110} Referring to the fact that the work of incultuation requires prudent judgment, John Paul II urged cooperation among particular churches of the same province, and with the universal Church. He also expressed warnings and drew attention to restrictions on the process of inculturation which must keep compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church.\textsuperscript{111} The pertinent writings of John Paul II stand as immediate precursors to the famous Fourth Instruction on the correct implementation of the constitution on the sacred liturgy.

Commonly designated by the Latin expression “\textit{Varietates Legitimaee}”, the Fourth Instruction was issued in 1994 by the Congregation of Divine worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. In the general introduction of this document, the term inculturation is understood as “the incarnation of the Gospel in autonomous cultures and, at the same time, the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. Inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic values of cultures through their integration into

\textsuperscript{109} Martin, 84.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Redemptoris Mission}, 52.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 53-54.
Christianity and the rooting of Christianity into various human cultures."\textsuperscript{112} This explanation of inculturation is merely a repetition of the previous definitions of the magisterium of the Church. This introductory section also gives specific reasons for the shift from adaptation to inculturation and stipulates what the Church expects to be the result of the process of inculturation. The instruction is then subdivided into four sections and a conclusion: 1) the process of inculturation throughout the history of salvation; 2) requirements and preliminary conditions for liturgical adaptation; 3) principles and practical norms for inculturation of the Roman Rite; and 4) areas of adaptation in the Roman Rite. With such an understanding of liturgical inculturation, and if implemented according the all the aforementioned principles, it becomes a necessity for every local church to consider this reality in its liturgy.

However, it is noteworthy that the idea of liturgical inculturation has not been compelling for all the members of the Roman Catholic Church. Opposition to the reform of the Catholic worship began as soon as the liturgical constitution was approved, and harsh critics and resistance rose up in the Church since the very beginning of the implementation of \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium}. For instance, in 1964 an international organization (\textit{Una Voce}) was founded in France by Georges Cerbelaud-Salagnac to promote the Pre-Vatican II Mass.\textsuperscript{113} Based on Faggioli’s research, in the 1970s an organized opposition (Society of Saint Pius X) under Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre began officially rejected the liturgical reform of Vatican II and called for a return to the Tridentine Liturgy (Latin Mass celebrated with the ‘Missal of 1962’). Without the

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Varietates Legitimaec}, 4.
\textsuperscript{113} This organization seeks to remain faithful to the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church. \textit{Una Voce} supports the idea of a coexistence of both the Latin and the vernacular masses.
Vatican approval Msgr. Lefebvre then ordained four bishops, creating by this fact a small schismatic group that was excommunicated by John Paul II in 1988.114

Furthermore, severe critics of liturgical inculturation continue to be felt in the Church up to the contemporaneous time. “This criticism by scholars and writers on many fronts has taken on new force since the publication of the Congregation for Divine Worship’s 2000 instruction, Liturgiam Authenticam (On the correct translation of Liturgical Texts) and even more recently with Pope Benedict XVI’s motu proprio, Summorum Pontificium”115 On July 7, 2007 in effect, Pope benedict XVI liberalized the permission to use the Pre-Vatican II liturgy or the so-called Missal of Blessed John XXIII (1962). With Pope Benedict XVI’s decree, the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite could, henceforth, coexist with the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite (use of the Missale Romanum promulgated by Pope Paul VI, 1969). On January 21, 2009 Pope Benedict XVI lifted up the excommunication imposed by his predecessor on the Lefebvrist.

Commenting on the Pre-Vatican II, Baldovin states:

I am sure that a good number of people (both those who remember it with affection and those who have never experienced anything like it) will find a well-produced Solemn High Mass according to the 1962 Missal aesthetically and emotionally quite pleasing. But at this point a Mass like that is just that - production - and it is not possible to reproduce the religious or cultural world in which it expressed the worship of Catholics. Ultimately even the critics of the liturgical reform will not find the pre-Vatican II liturgy compelling … My suspicion is that except for a tiny minority the future of Roman catholic liturgy does not lie with the pre-Vatican II rites.116

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114 Faggioli, Massimo, True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012, 146-152. Faggioli asserts that in rejecting the liturgical reform, Lefebvre and his followers were also rejecting the theological core of Vatican II which has to do with the recognition of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, the commitment to a new understanding of faith anchored in the Word of God. Through the liturgy of Vatican II, this core includes the position of Scripture in the Church and the existence and role of episcopal conferences and episcopal collegiality, rejected by Lefebvre as “discontinuity” with Western European tradition (in truth, more imperial than biblical) of the monarchical model of Church government.
116 Ibid., 132-133.
Conclusion

Christian liturgy did not begin from a zero-point and it did not develop in a cultural vacuum to construct a completely new symbolic field for the manifestation of the faith. Rather, the liturgy drew from elements of the surrounding cultures in a selective way, and formulated new rites and rituals in which different or deeper meaning was given to make them appropriate for the Christian faith. From its very beginning in early antiquity, stepping out of the Jewish context, the liturgy was overlaid by the Greek and Roman culture as the nascent Church stretched into the pagan world. This process of liturgical inculturation evolved and obtained official recognition with the Second Vatican Council and some post-conciliar documents of the magisterium.

In reality, because of the dynamic character of the cultures and the ongoing task of evangelization in new contexts, liturgical inculturation is a permanent process. In any case, “the Christian liturgy is not a museum specimen of religiosity, but the expression of an immense living process made up of the real lives of hosts of men and women in all sorts of ages and circumstances.”117 Any Christian liturgy that attempts to ignore its cultural context runs the risk of being irrelevant to the local people. It is, therefore, a necessity and not just a luxury for every local church to consider liturgical inculturation in its effort to celebrate the faith.

However, liturgical inculturation is a delicate task that should be carried out according to the principles and norms of the magisterium of the Church, while keeping in mind that the liturgy has both unchangeable and changeable aspects. The guidelines of Sacrosanctum Concilium and Varietes Legitima should be followed in the process of inculturating the liturgy.

117 Dix, Gregory, XIV (introduction).
CHAPTER THREE: LITURGY IN THE PARISH

Introduction

Most Catholic Christians can remember having an experience of a boring celebration. It is not rare to hear people switching from their local parish to other parishes because of their thirst for a healthy liturgical environment with a great preacher, good singing, and a parish that breathes hospitality. “Each parish is responsible for providing suitable and effective liturgical experiences, capable of inducing the inner and exterior involvement of the people.”118 Being a member of a parish implies having a living and ongoing relationship with God and with the other parishioners, even in a multicultural context like the Diocese of St. Thomas U.S. Virgin Islands. Good organization and celebration of the liturgy is a key factor in the spiritual growth and social commitment of Catholic Christians in a parish community.

Importance of Liturgy in the Church

The Sacred Constitution on the Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) of the Second Vatican Council declares that “liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.” Commenting on this Constitution, Baldovin argues that the work of Vatican II and the subsequent efforts at renewal undertaken throughout the world manifest how vital worship is in Christian life. He believes that one does not even need documents or theological analysis to come to the common sense conclusion that the weekly assembly of Christians forms their identity as a people and provides the inspiration for their common mission. In his first Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis reaffirmed the importance of liturgy saying that the Church both evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy. Indeed, the liturgy lies at the very heart of Catholic identity and practice. “No matter where we stand, the liturgy is precious to all who bear the name of Christian - and so thinking about it, even arguing about it, is an important necessary endeavor.”

In fact, the Church does not live in the abstract; only concrete assemblies gather as a community of the faithful in particular churches. The People of God spread in particular churches in various geographic locations constitute the Church. Every individual Christian affirms his or her membership in the Catholic Church through participation in the liturgy. The Eucharist in particular lies at the center of Catholic Christian worship. “At no other time are the vast majority of Catholics in such contact with one another and with Church leaders. This is the prime moment for Catholics to

119 Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10.
121 Evangelii Gaudium, 24.
reaffirm their faith and deepen their knowledge and understanding of it.”  

The liturgy is a privileged locus of human-divine encounter. Moreover, the most regular and immediate experience of the Church for most Catholics is the liturgy.

The regular heartbeat of the parish life is the Sunday liturgy. Referring to Saint John Chrysostom, Dupre affirms that the parish:

is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist; a place that initiates Christian people into ordinary expression of liturgical life. In fact, you cannot pray at home as at Church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of priests.  

Therefore, it is crucially important for the life of faith that Christians come together with others for liturgical celebration, and most importantly Sunday Eucharist. “Liturgy will not fit as another program besides many. It has a priority because it is the very reason for the existence of a parish. If done well, it can integrate other activities.”

Characteristics of a Good Liturgy

If a parish is primarily a worship community, what makes for good liturgy and how do we achieve this goal? “The forms of worship operate best when they stir the mind and the hearts of the people and engage them actively in the liturgical action. Worship becomes most attractive when it is performed with faith and characterized by simplicity, beauty, clarity, directness, solemnity, and joyful dignity.” In good liturgies authenticity and commitment are melded into one reality. It is a worship experience where people truly encounter the Lord God. In order to achieve such a spiritual goal, Mitchell points

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126 Calivas, 131.
out some elements to be taken into consideration, such as the ritual readiness of the assembly, the need for care and competence in celebration, the coherent relation between the table of word and the table of sacrament, communally sung prayers as a worship response to God, the essential link between liturgy and social justice, a holy living together in faith through Christ and the Spirit, and finally the joyful enthusiasm that erupts when humble services unite presider and participants.¹²⁷

In other to achieve this standard of worship several components are required. First, at the parish level, Shannon identifies two liturgy committees that need to work together to have an effective liturgical celebration: the ‘ministerial committee’ and the ‘committee of the whole.’¹²⁸ The ministerial committee is the team of various ministers who prepare the details of the worship service that will take place on Sunday. This team is made up of the presider, lectors, ministers of Holy Communion, altar servers, ministers of hospitality, the ministers of sacred music and others.

Their task is to prepare a worship experience that will offer so powerful an encounter with the absolute holy mystery of God that the people assembled will emerge radically renewed, transformed, and challenged. The planners must make possible a meeting with God in Jesus, dead and risen, that will move a community to a renewed commitment to justice and peace, a readiness to put themselves at the service of others.¹²⁹

In addition to the team of liturgical ministers, there is the committee of the whole constituted by all the faithful. “This committee, too, must prepare carefully for the liturgical celebration. They, too, are celebrants. At the center stage in the Eucharist is the

¹²⁹ Ibid.
assembly of God’s people, not the priest.” The whole assembly should participate actively in the liturgy in order to experience the presence of Christ in its oneness.

Second, the realization a good liturgy in a parish requires good preparation by the ministers. In fact, authentic prayer and worship does not just happen. Many times liturgists assume that people know the meaning of rituals and the way to perform them when actually they do not. Therefore, we should not take it for granted. “Given that the liturgy and ritual of the Church is pretty much in place, and assuming that this fosters full and active participation of the Church members, it is the role of the group to ensure the integrity of liturgical experience.” Liturgical ministers should be taught not only the correct way to perform the rituals, but also, and more importantly about the meaning and purpose of each liturgical act.

A third element should be taken in consideration. Mullins and Reamer insist that the liturgical committee should be given the resources it needs. The members of this committee must base the understanding of their responsibilities upon the Church’s documents and not merely the pastor’s preferences. Further, it would be beneficial to offer regular liturgical catechesis to the faithful in the parish’s bulletin and website, as well as including basic liturgical formation in religious education (especially sacramental preparation). People want to understand; liturgy is more effective when people understand fully what is going on. In extraordinary circumstances, Steinfels even recommends “teaching Masses,” which include taking time at the beginning of each

130 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
liturgy and interrupting its parts if necessary, to explain the actions and symbolism.\textsuperscript{133} It would be wise however, to inform parishioners few weeks prior to the implementation of the “teaching Masses” method, so that they would be prepared for it.

Furthermore, the care with which each minister performs his or her role is fundamental during the liturgical celebration. If liturgy is the most important thing we do as Catholics, it should be celebrated with dignity and reverence. Doing liturgy well necessitates observing some basic rules. Wagner believes that by knowingly or unknowingly disregarding the rules of liturgy may risk distorting the meaning of our Sunday worship. Even though liturgy should focus not on the rules but on prayer, rules are necessary because orderly liturgical celebrations rest upon them in the same way that language rests upon its grammar.\textsuperscript{134} Creativity and innovation should not be excluded, but should be done with moderation and in accord with official liturgical guidelines.

**Special Importance Preaching**

The realization of a good liturgy in the parish can be hardly achieved unless adequate attention is given to the preaching the Word of God. Indeed, a suitable place for innovation and creativity in liturgy is the homily, where effectiveness depends on the charism and seriousness of the preacher. In fact, preaching within the liturgy is a very important ministry, and the faithful attach great importance to it. The homily owes its special status to its Eucharistic context. The homily cannot be reduced to a form of entertainment, but it does need to give life and meaning to the celebration. In this regard, Pope Francis uses the image of a mother’s conversation with her child to describe what happens during the homily. Inasmuch as she too is Mother of the faithful, the “Church

\textsuperscript{133} Steinfels, 22.

preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her child, knowing that the child trusts that what she is teaching is for his or her benefit, for children know that they are loved.”

As a result,

this setting, both natural and ecclesial, in which the dialogue between the Lord and his People takes place, should be encouraged by the closeness of the preacher, the warmth of his tone of voice, the unpretentiousness of his manner of speaking, the confidence of his gestures. Even if the homily at times may be somewhat tedious, if this maternal and ecclesial spirit is present, it will always bear fruit, in due time, in the heart of her children.

The preacher should always strive to communicate joy to his listeners; he has to find words that set hearts on fire. The Holy Father affirms that the homilist has the wonderful but difficult task of joining hearts, the heart of the Lord with the hearts of his people. In light of this heavy responsibility, the preacher can deliver an effective coherent and persuasive homily if he takes prolonged time to study, pray, and reflect on Scriptures and pastoral creativity, always considering the specific circumstances of assembly to whom he will preach.

In the parish liturgy the ordinary preachers are priests and deacons, but in parishes without priests, religious sisters and lay people like catechists also proclaim the Word of God on Sundays, and sometimes follow it with a reflection. Maloney offers seven keys for successful preaching:

1. Prepare for brevity ‘Like a wise man be brief, but say much in few words’ (Sir. 38:8)
2. Immerse in Scripture ‘Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God’ (1Pt. 4:4)
3. Interpret the Word ‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproving, for correcting and for teaching in holiness’ (2Tim. 3:16)
4. Know the Listeners ‘By means of many parables, he taught them the message in a way they could understand’ (Mk. 4:22)
5. Listen to Christ ‘Whatever I command you, you shall speak’ (Jer. 1:7)
6. Be real ‘When the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth’ (Eccl. 11:3)

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135 Evangelii Gaudium, 139.
136 Ibid., 140.
137 Ibid., 143.
7. Be open to symbols ‘Jesus bent down and started tracing on the ground with his finger’ (Jn. 8:6).\textsuperscript{138}

Further, truly effective preachers are transparent believers who share in God’s pathos for the human condition. At the end of a good homily, listeners may still hear the preacher’s words ringing in their ears and sense them gnawing at their hearts.\textsuperscript{139}

**Other Ways to Enhance the Parochial Liturgy**

Parish liturgies can be improved by periodic evaluation of the celebrations. This element is not common in many parishes, but ministers should not underestimate its importance. Evaluating the celebration helps identify and correct the mistakes and encourages the parish always to search for means to improve its liturgy. Ministers should use multiple tools to evaluate liturgies, including getting feedback for the homily, taping the celebration and reviewing it with the ministers to obtain an objective, ruthless, and honest evaluation. The parish may also employ experts in communication, liturgy, and theology who understand that it is not an easy task to pray - to really pray - in front of other people, because liturgy is never merely a superficial public performance.

All the members of the liturgical assembly should worship with the conviction that they are themselves, together, offering the great thanksgiving. They should not be watching and hearing someone else doing it for them. This means concretely that the assembly should fully participate in the dialogue with the presider by giving the appropriate responses and making the appropriate gestures at the appropriate moments (standing, kneeling, giving the sign of peace, etc.) “Because liturgical celebration is the worship action of the entire Church … the entire congregation is an active component.


\textsuperscript{139} Maloney, 16.
There is no audience, no passive element in liturgical celebration.”\textsuperscript{140} When necessary and if appropriate, liturgical aids such as hymnals, small missals, and programs can be used by the assembly to follow the celebration and join the choir or the cantor in singing. Liturgical music is very important in all human acts of worship. It is an important element to increase active participation in the liturgy. Indeed,

common voices lifted in song can forge a unity of spirit from diversity and disunity. In a similar way, music may add beauty and dignity to acts and gestures which constitute and give rise to worship. Hence, the beat of a rhythmic drum, the sound of a ram’s horn, the chant of a psalm, the mixture of a choir in polyphonic harmony, the acclamations and hymns of an assembly of believers are all expressions of faith and humble worship.\textsuperscript{141}

The gathering space of worship affects its execution and its impact on the worshipers. It is desirable that the worship space provides sufficient room for participants. Art and seasonal decorations are welcomed as they appeal to senses and thereby create a good atmosphere and a good mood. “Flowers, plants and trees - genuine, of course - are particularly apt for decoration of the liturgical space, since they are by nature always discreet in their message, never cheap or tawdry or ill-made. Decoration should never impede the approach to or encircling of the altar or any of the ritual movement and action, but there are places in most liturgical spaces where it is appropriate and where it can be enhancing. The whole space is to be considered the arena of decoration, not merely the sanctuary.”\textsuperscript{142} The entire gathering space should be seen as the dwelling place of God’s holy and celebrating people. Baldovin demonstrates that the nature of the liturgical space, the quality of its decorations, the lighting, acoustics, and above all the sense of excitement and engagement animate the liturgical ministers

\textsuperscript{140} Dupre, 750.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
constitute key elements for good liturgy. Most importantly, the environment of this gathering space must be one of hospitality.

Hospitality must become one of the marks of any worship community. It is an act of being cared for and being made to feel welcome. This is the responsibility of everyone. Even though every member of the assembly should be an ambassador of hospitality, some individuals should be specifically charged with this function. “The presence and ministry of ushers fulfill this task by seating those who gather, by giving direction and information, by noting and attending to the comfort of the assembly by adjusting the heat, air conditioning, lighting, windows, and doors. Usually ushers also function by taking up the offerings of the faithful, assisting with the offertory procession and attending to emergencies or to other unforeseen circumstances which may arise.” Hospitality also supposes that special accommodations and attention be present in the community for the worshippers with disabilities, for the elderly, for children, and strangers. Moreover, Mitchell states that in a hospitable setting, the community’s diversity (cultural, racial, linguistic, generational, gender, etc.) is joyfully acknowledged rather than painfully sidestepped or ignored.

**Ultimate Criteria of an Effective Liturgy**

Successful liturgies lead to spiritual growth and charitable actions. What matters for parish liturgy is not only the beauty of the external celebrations, but also what happens in everyday life after the celebrations. According to Wagner, we will have good liturgy when every object, gesture, song, and prayer of our worship is done to welcome

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144 Dupre, 750.
145 Mitchell, 11.
the strangers and liberate the poor in our society.\textsuperscript{146} Hence, there should always be a strong connection between liturgical celebrations and the whole life of Catholic Christians. Indeed, “liturgy is about life, not about correct ritual. Liturgy is both an expression of who we are and who we are trying to become.”\textsuperscript{147} Therefore, a liturgy that has no impact or consequences for the way Christians live their lives is off the mark. We are pure beneficiaries of God graces, and are to become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, who share in his preoccupation of human dignity. Shannon reminds us that,

\begin{quote}
The liturgy must not be seen as an isolated, special intervention of grace into our otherwise profane graceless lives. Rather, our acts of worship are symbolic expressions of what Rahner calls the ‘liturgy of the world.’ The liturgy of the Church is a symbolic manifestation of God’s continual self-revelation to us and our free response to God, a process that takes place throughout our lives and our history.\textsuperscript{148}
\end{quote}

To better understand this, the cultural context of a local church must be examined.

**Illustrative Application in a Context**

Every parish should be attentive to the cultures in its own community and be open to liturgical inculturation. Let us examine the multicultural setting of the Diocese of St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands (USVI). The USVI is a cultural melting pot, consisting of African descendants (from slavery), native aboriginal West Indian peoples, and expatriates from North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia and other Caribbean countries. English is the main language, but Spanish, Creole, French-Patois and West Indian dialects are also common. USVI citizens have the advantage of being both American and Caribbean. Multiculturality is evident in every single parish, yet it is not

\textsuperscript{146} Wagner, 4.
\textsuperscript{147} Shannon, 24.
easy to find bilingual or multilingual ministers. How can liturgy in this context help people from various cultural groups encounter the Lord in their celebrations?

The response of the Diocese so far has been to recruit priests and permanent deacons from different origins. In addition, the Diocese offers Masses in different languages in every parish (English, Spanish, Creole, French) because “people pray more easily when they speak in their own language, when they sing and dance to their own music, and when they use gestures and art developed by their own culture. It can be asserted that, as far as possible, different cultural groups of a parish have a right to worship regularly in their own language and their own cultural idiom.”149 Less commonly, parishes celebrate a bilingual liturgy (English-Spanish), but it happens only when the liturgical calendar cannot tolerate multiple celebrations on days like Christmas midnight Mass. I believe that more should be done in the liturgical practice of this diocese.

The multicultural context of the USVI can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity, and more could be done beyond bilingual or multilingual liturgies. The formation of liturgical ministers, priests and deacons in particular, should include training for ministry in a multicultural context. Cultural diversity must not impede the ideal of unity in the liturgy in every parish of the Diocese. In fact, “a parish can welcome the greatest diversity in good celebrations but should not tolerate the mediocre however far-out or far-in the congregation is purported to be. Nor does such a diversity of celebrations imply that there is one gospel preached to one group, another to another.”150 Offering multicultural celebrations on days such as the Triduum, major solemnities, services of

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150 Huck, 39.
Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, the titular feast day of the parish, and Emancipation Day (special feast in the Virgin Islands) can foster unity. In addition, Mark Francis recommends multicultural civic celebrations such as Thanksgiving and Labor Day.\textsuperscript{151} All these examples are fitting moments to celebrate the cultural diversity of parishes in the Diocese of St. Thomas.

Additionally, Pentecost is a fitting day to acknowledge, rejoice, and celebrate the variety of ethnic cultures as a richness for the diocesan family. The liturgical readings of this solemnity are appropriate to preach on regarding unity in diversity\textsuperscript{152} The leaders of the community must foster the spirit of understanding and mutual acceptance in parishes. The pastors and associate priests should interact with parishioners to better understand their needs. The formation of diocesan and parochial liturgical committees should include representatives from all the cultural groups. Moreover, parish leaders should be aware that people might share the same language while having distinct customs and traditions. For example, all the Hispanic people of the Virgin Islands speak Spanish but they come from different places in Latin America and the surrounding islands.

Furthermore, cultural diversity can develop a multicultural spirituality. “At times, a cultural group will have to sacrifice cherished rites and practices in order to celebrate the liturgy with their brothers and sisters in Christ. The presence of many cultures in a parish often demands that compromises be made and that people be willing to learn each others’ customs and traditions.”\textsuperscript{153} For instance, many components of Hispanic spirituality (prayers, devotion to the Blessed Mother, etc.) can be useful in the celebration

\textsuperscript{151} Francis, 53.
\textsuperscript{152} See the readings of the solemnity of Pentecost at the Mass during the Day, particularly 1Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{153} Francis, 55.
of good liturgies. The vibrant and active style of African American music and Caribbean skills with musical instruments can be wisely incultrated to enhance the liturgy in the Diocese. Additionally, it would be wise to invest more energy in hospitality with particular attention to visitors (tourists), always great in number at the parishes of the Virgin Islands. Acknowledging the presence of these visitors and showing them evident signs of hospitality can make their experience of worship memorable.
Conclusion

A Catholic Church in which people are freely drawn by great liturgies is not unthinkable, for faith grows when it is well expressed in careful and organized liturgical celebrations. Steinfels states that effective liturgies are those that render inner and spiritual transformation visible, audible and tangible, in the heart of felt participation of the congregation, the beauty and grace of the ritual, and the honesty and intelligence of the preaching. This is not an unachievable goal. Yet it will not happen unless the Church invests preparation in both ministers of liturgy and the assembly of the faithful. We must come to realize that an aesthetically, intellectually, and spiritually impoverished liturgy only alienates the people from the Church and her worship. Spiritless worship does not engender commitment. When the people in the parish are not engaged, it has little transformational effect on their lives. Liturgical inculturation in the multicultural context of the Diocese of St. Thomas (USVI) can help contribute to vibrant faith in the Islands.

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Steinfels, 22.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

Liturgical inculturation is a complex and delicate process, and the commitment of worshippers to full participation in Christian liturgy is also a commitment to growth in cultural awareness. At first, all Christian worship was dominated by the Jewish elements from which it originated. Because of the special meaning it was given by Christ, Jewish worship opened to non-Jews and the new interpretation of the early Church’s worship permitted pagan cultural elements into Christian liturgy. The Jewish liturgy was transformed into Greek and Greek into Roman and Roman liturgy was supplemented and augmented by Franco-German and Anglo-Saxon liturgy and so forth. Christianity affected non-Christian cultures and vice-versa.

Progressively, in spite of a period of standardization, the Church’s liturgy took the forms of local churches according to specific cultures, while keeping some unchangeable core elements. From the Second Vatican Council onward, liturgical inculturation was officially acknowledged as an inherent requirement for the celebration of the faith.

The principal reason for diverse liturgies is not that each culture has its own religious modes of expression, though this is pertinent. It is rather that memories to be harbored within the memory of Christ’s pasch are different, and the hopes nourished in the hope of his rule are different … Because these memories and hopes are so varied, the way in which Christ’s memory is kept differs, with a different tonality to the story of his pasch and different ritual movement, prayers and songs that ensure creativity from a memory. That is a basic ground for different liturgies, which are then celebrated in varieties of aesthetic cultural forms that best embody for a people its memories and hopes.¹⁵⁵

Therefore, it is crucial for the universal Church to safeguard diverse liturgies, making them suitable to various contexts. The effectiveness of liturgy in the Diocese of


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Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands depends on the capacity of this local church to embrace its rich spectrum of cultural diversity in wise liturgical inculturation.
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