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Book Review: Dietrich von Hildebrand, Liturgy and Personality

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Liturgy and Personality by Dietrich von Hildebrand. Hildebrand Press, 2016. Pp. 160. Price \$17.99 USD. ISBN-13: 978-1939773005

First published in 1932 at the height of the Liturgical Movement, this new translation of philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand's (1889-1977) classic *Liturgy and Personality* from the newly founded Hildebrand Press with a new foreword by Bishop Robert Barron, offers contemporary readers an opportunity to encounter a profoundly contemplative and yet rigorous treatment of the liturgy's transformative potential.

One time student of famed phenomenological originator Edmund Husserl, Dietrich von Hildebrand's conversion to the Catholic faith in 1914 resulted in a multitude of works on the spiritual life, from the unique perspective of phenomenological personalism. *Liturgy and Personality* is one of his earlier works in Christian spirituality, but demonstrates mature thinking concerning the formative role of liturgy in the lives of believers, avoiding the polemics which often accompanied his later works as he sought to clarify various liturgical excesses which followed the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Hildebrand's thesis is that the Liturgy of the Church, as expressed most particularly in the Mass, the Divine Office, and the Sacraments, provides a profoundly transformative experience for one who enters into such experiences reverently. Careful not to instrumentalise the liturgy, as though it could be used simply as a pedagogical tool, von Hildebrand asserts that the primary purpose of the liturgy is the rightful praise and glorification of God. Hildebrand offers his readers an opportunity to enter into an awareness of the pedagogical and formative secondary effect of the prayerful repetition of the liturgy of the Church.

For Hildebrand, the liturgy forms one in his or her capacity to recognise and respond appropriately to values as they present themselves. Hildebrand goes to lengths to demonstrate that the value of a being (object or person) is intrinsic to its being as such, not to the relative value that a valuing person bestows upon it. The concepts of value and response to value are of particular importance in coming to an understanding of Hildebrand's work as a whole, and the newly added foreword by Bishop Robert Barron provides a masterful explanation of this concept. As such, the Hildebrand Project have been strategic in offering *Liturgy and Personality* as among the first publications of their new imprint, as it will be of use to many emerging scholars interested in Christian Personalism, philosophical aesthetics, ethics, and Hildebrand more generally.

What is perhaps most interesting about *Liturgy and Personality* is Hildebrand's somewhat prescient emphasis on a theological anthropology that is at once Trinitarian and Christocentric, which was to be highlighted in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council. This Trinitarian Christocentrism, which was utilised by Pope John Paul II as something of a hermeneutical key for the interpretation and implementation of the Council, posits Christ as the human person par excellence, the model human, stating that "only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (GS n. 22). Hildebrand demonstrates in a coherent and beautiful way how the reverent and spiritually awake person, one with 'personality' in Hildebrand's parlance, can be transformed into the person of Christ by their prayerful participation in the liturgy, learning to respond appropriately to the ultimate values which emerge in and through the liturgy.

While some might be put off by the consistent references to a pre-Vatican II liturgy, complete with at times lengthy quotations from of Latin text – thankfully translated in this most recent edition – *Liturgy and Personality* is by no means simply a work of times now past with little value for today.

Instead, the Hildebrand Project have made available in this new translation a work of enduring value which adds much to contemporary discussions about the kind of mutual enrichment which might result from having both the ordinary and extraordinary forms of the Roman Rite coexisting alongside one another, *a la* Pope Benedict XVI's Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum*, (2007), but also, and perhaps even more interestingly, the discussions which have emerged in non-Catholic circles in recent years following the publication of the Cultural Liturgies project of Reformed theologian James K.A. Smith.¹

This new and definitive edition of what many consider to be a classic work of the Liturgical Movement deserves a wide readership, not only amongst liturgical scholars, or those with an interest in the Catholic personalism of Hildebrand, but of people of all walks of life seeking a deeply Catholic and liturgical spirituality.

¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); and, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). See also Smith's more popularly written work *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press: Baker Publishing Group, 2016).