

7-11-2022

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Chris Kan

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### Recommended Citation

Kan, Chris. "Hopes and Dreams of Liturgical Renewal: 3 books from my shelf." *Pastoral Liturgy* 53, no. 1 (2022): 1-3.  
<https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy/vol53/iss1/4>

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## Hopes and Dreams of Liturgical Renewal: 3 books from my shelf

By Chris Kan

Out of all my weaknesses, buying books - especially old ones - ranks high on the list! In this 60<sup>th</sup> year since *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) was promulgated, I have browsed some of the liturgical ones, wondering what the authors, in their unique time and place, thought of the reform, particularly its progression and implementation and, perhaps more importantly, their hopes for the future.

Bernard Botte OSB was an important voice towards the end of the first Liturgical Movement and in the immediate post-conciliar period. His 1973 book *'From Silence to Participation: An insider's view of liturgical renewal'*<sup>1</sup> tells his story: from Benedictine Monk in Belgium to Rome at the Council, and finally his work in the Pastoral Liturgy Centres of Paris. His reflections in the final chapter 'Taking Stock' were written a decade after the conciliar reform began, yet still reflect those first heady days of new rites, vernacular language and a wider selection of biblical texts.

Before considering his hopes for the future, Botte lays out his manifesto for liturgical renewal: 'to create living assemblies and communities who participate to the fullest in the prayer and life of the Church' (p.165). He would have liked to see the continuation of Latin as the prime liturgical language yet saw the importance of the vernacular. This was brought home to him when he visited what he terms 'ordinary parishes' throughout Europe, noting congregations responding and listening carefully, many receiving communion. Very different, Botte notes, to his youthful experiences in which people 'kept busy as best they could . . . waiting for Mass to be over' (p. 166). He goes on to praise the renewed Liturgy of the Word, the variety of Eucharistic prayers, and concelebration.

Looking forward, Botte remained optimistic. He saw SC and the following documents as a 'plan for the future' (p.186) yet acknowledged that seeing immediate or sensational results was both unlikely and unwanted. These sorts of results were, to Botte's mind, risky, and spoke to a shallow understanding of what the reform was really all about: thus, increased numbers of participants - 'success' - did not equal a liturgy that reflected Vatican II's renewed understanding of the Church and the faith. Botte's hope was that moving forward, the liturgical flexibility encouraged by the Council Fathers (where Episcopal conferences would make decisions on appropriate liturgical adaption) would embrace the Vatican II priority of renewal in catechesis and preaching.

Some twenty one years later, Jesuit Dennis Smolarski, in his book *'Sacred Mysteries: Sacramental Principles and Liturgical Practice'*<sup>2</sup>, reflected on not dissimilar issues. However, the world changed through the 1970's and 80's. A new

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Botte, *From Silence to Participation: An Insider's View of Liturgical Renewal* United States: Pastoral Press, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Smolarski, Dennis. *Sacred Mysteries: Sacramental Principles and Liturgical Practice*. United States: Paulist Press, 1995.

Pope had been elected. Liberation theology became the issue *de jour*, and the role of women in the church had begun to be debated more freely. Written twenty years after SC, Smolarski's text is a response to Kathleen Hughes' thoughts that what is 'now needed is less catechesis and more mystagogia . . . doing the rites well' (p.15). He casts a wide net: from considering the nature of liturgical practice - particularly where it was not life-giving - to the role of space, music and the role of the assembly.

The chapter title - '*Obfuscating the Mystery*' - gives some hints about his thoughts. For Smolarski, Liturgies are 'times of ritual interaction by Christians eager to celebrate Christ . . . to be nourished . . . in order to live in this confusing and contradictory world' (p161.) He sees how easy it is for well-meaning and enthusiastic reform to prevent this from happening, echoing Botte's warning of pursuing the novel or 'mountain top' experience.

One example of his thinking is the 'Non-integration of Various Ministers'. Smolarski discusses the move from the Tridentine Liturgy, in which the Eucharist could be celebrated publicly by a priest and server alone, to the one envisioned by SC and the important role that all of the Baptised play, whether that be as celebrant, reader, altar server, musician and so forth. Liturgy should never be a one-man or woman show or else the gathered community is denied expression of the richness of gifts that God has given them. As he says, 'God has given . . . various gifts and talents, and they should not be overlooked . . . (but) cultivated for the benefit of the community' (p.169).

He ends his book with a very pertinent comment: liturgy will continue to evolve as the world and those who live in it change, but the reality we celebrate remains the same (p.179).

My most recent text on the reform is Kevin Irwin's '*What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II*'.<sup>3</sup> Writing in 2014, the papacy of Benedict XVI had relaxed some prohibitions regarding the celebration of the Tridentine Mass and a new English Missal was published, with controversy over issues of translation and language. Within his United States context, what became known as 'the reform of the reform' had gained some traction. This effort to 're-sacralise' the Vatican II liturgy in various ways included a return to *ad orientem* celebration and the wider use of Latin and Gregorian Chant. Whilst acknowledging his context, Irwin notes that he is committed to 'the ongoing implementation of the liturgy as reformed through the church's wisdom after Vatican II.'

A few brief paragraphs cannot do justice to the detail and breadth of his relaxed analysis, but two ideas - one from each end of the book - are worth noting. In the introduction, Irwin writes that it is the questions we ask, rather than the answers we find, that are key. Within a liturgical context, each new generation of worshippers, scholars, and leaders, whilst 'standing on the shoulders' of those who came before them, again asks questions about how we should pray communally and what this reveals about ourselves and the God to whom we are praying. To do this, Irwin

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin Irwin *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II*. United States: Paulist Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unimelb/detail.action?docID=4625709> (no page numbers)

examines ten areas of liturgical practice: from participation to translation, and the role of the arts in popular devotions.

The conclusion is where he draws his thoughts into four short ideas, two of which are worth recounting. Firstly, Irwin notes that a lot of time is spent in planning and conducting our liturgical life, and this is necessary as it is in that very space that our Christian lives are formed. Secondly, and to my mind echoing some of the thoughts of Vigil Michel from the pre-conciliar liturgical movement, liturgy must be more than just the correct observation of rites; it should change and influence our lives *outside* of the liturgy, so that we become people of the beatitudes. 'What we learn in those buildings (*sacred space*) should lead us to more committed lives outside the buildings'.

What can we learn from the thoughts of these three writers? There is certainly a movement in thought: from initial hopes fulfilled in Botte, to more mature reflections on practice in Smolarski, and an even wider view of the place of liturgy in communal life, inside and outside the Church, in Irwin. Yet time marches on, and the last of these reflections will soon be out of date. Yet, if you are reading this, there are many who are still concerned about communal prayer and how we provide spaces and opportunities that allow people to enter into dialogue with the divine.

What might a book written in 2025 about the reforms contain? The recent Plenary Council's call for both 'fully conscious and active participation in the Church's liturgy and sacraments', and more liturgical catechesis and formation, echo those of SC 60 years ago. These remain important, but there are wider issues than these. You will have your own concerns and thoughts, but for me, I wonder: How do we embrace Aboriginal Spirituality liturgically? What of the role of women in our churches – are we ready to move beyond tokenism into the realms of homiletics or ordained ministry? How do we move forward collaboratively - the ordained and lay working together - to build lifegiving liturgical communities outside of the usual labelling of conservative/progressive?

Whatever the future may be, reflection on liturgical practice, and liturgy's connection to the lives of those who come to pray, will continue. As we live out our own story in the light of the larger story of faith that we celebrate and proclaim, whether we write a book or not, we are a part of the ongoing unfolding of the conciliar liturgical vision.