

Exorcising the Spirits of Confusion: Summorum Pontificum and the End of Liturgical Freelancing

Well, the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* is out, and the “spirits (poltergeists) of Vatican II” are agitated. Watch out for flying liturgical pottery and levitating felt banners.

We would expect to have all the well-worn clichés about how the Pope wants to turn back the clock dragged out of the modernist arsenal. Of course, the *National Catholic Reporter* has not disappointed us.

In her July 10 column, *From Where I Stand*, Sister Joan Chittister, deigns to enlighten us about how the poor Holy Father has blundered again. And, of course, she has the appropriate credentials to do so, having gained notoriety over the years for her support of [abortion rights](#), [the ordination of women to the priesthood](#), and her [general defiance of the Vatican](#).

Sister Joan begins with the obligatory defense of inclusive language, and the usual demeaning of the Church’s unbroken tradition concerning the persons of Blessed Trinity. For Sister Joan, to insist that there is a real difference between a father and a mother is dissent from the deposit of the feminist, and that won’t be tolerated.

Perhaps Sister Joan needs to be reminded that most women have no problem with the fatherhood of God, or with strong men. In fact, most are tired of emasculated men who allow themselves to have their lives run by women. The idea is simple: Fatherhood equals strength and compassion. Kind of like the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, the author of the motu proprio. He tells the truth out of love for the Bride (the Church) and for his children (all souls). Honest, telling the truth is a good thing. It is not a monstrous crime of the patriarchy.

Two Liturgical World Views?

On the contrary, says Sister Joan. According to her, the motu proprio will not “make reconciliation easier with women, who are now pointedly left out of the Eucharistic celebration entirely.” Oh, really? Women have no place in the Tridentine liturgy? The motu proprio degrades lay participation in the Mass and reserves it to a “male cast” of priests?

Yes, says Sister Joan. According to Sister, the Tridentine Rite conveys a “theology of transcendence” as opposed to the “Vatican II liturgy” which proposes a “theology of transformation.” Sister says that the traditional rite is “certainly not a celebration of the entire community,” but merely “a priestly act, a private devotion of both priest and people.” It “makes the congregation, the laity, observers of the rite rather than participants in it.”

Sister also says that new liturgy has corrected all the old stuffiness:

The Vatican II liturgy, on the other hand, steps a person in community, in social concern, in the hard, cold, clear reality of the present. The people and priest pray the Mass together, in common language, with a common theme. They interact with one another. They sing ‘a new church into being,’ non-sexist, inclusive, centered together in the Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Galilee curing the sick, raising the dead, talking to women and inviting the Christian community to do the same.

Two Aspects of the Priesthood of Christ

Since Sister is such an advocate of the “Vatican II liturgy”—as well she should be—we would expect her words about how the traditional liturgy privatizes prayer, and excludes women and lay people, how it embodies a mistaken theology of transcendence to the prejudice of a theology of transformation, to be straight out of the Council documents. No? Let’s see.

A good place to start is to look at a basic distinction made by the Council between priest and laity, a distinction which Sister says is overblown in the traditional liturgy, to the point that the laity don’t count at all.

In fact, the Second Vatican Council teaches that both priest and laity possess the priestly office, though the priesthood of the ordained minister and the priesthood of the laity are clearly distinct. Here is what the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium* says about these two aspects of the priesthood:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity (10).

So both the priesthood of the ordained minister and that of the baptized lay person are at the same time interrelated and yet different in both degree and essence. The ministerial priest teaches, rules and alone makes present the sacrifice, and in the person of Christ offers it to the Father. But the faithful (both men and women), “in virtue of their royal priesthood,” join in the sacrifice by their reception of the Eucharist and the offering of their whole lives in union with the offering of Christ.

This idea is reinforced in several other places in *Lumen Gentium*. In Chapter 2, “The People of God” we read the following:

The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity (10).

Further in Chapter 4, “The Laity,” we read:

To those whom he intimately joins to his life and mission he also gives a share in his priestly office, to offer spiritual worship for the glory of the Father and the salvation of man. . . For all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (cf. Pet. 2:5). In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord (34).

But is this what Sister is advocating when she claims that in the “Vatican II liturgy” the “people and priest pray the Mass together?” Is the doctrine of the two aspects of the priesthood in *Lumen Gentium* a new invention, a reform of outmoded attitudes? And does the so called Tridentine Mass undermine royal priesthood of the faithful?

Liturgical Social Engineering

In fact, throughout the whole of Sister Joan Chittister's article, she makes no mention of the baptismal priesthood, the sacrificial character of the Mass, nor does she seem even to be aware that the Mass has anything to do with eternal salvation. For her the mutual participation of both priest and laity in the Mass is an exercise of inclusivity: "They interact with one another. They sing 'a new church into being,' non-sexist, inclusive."

In traditional feminist fashion, Sister politicizes the liturgy in view of a special social agenda. This is an effective method of changing the way Catholics think, since the basic principle of liturgical life is *lex orandi, lex credendi*, "as the Church prays, so she believes." If Sister can just convince us that Vatican II makes the liturgy all about interaction and inclusivity, then we will all be duly prepared to receive from her hand the sacrament of social engineering.

That Sister makes a point of saying the traditional liturgy "*privatizes* the spiritual life" is telling. It seems this is her belief, not because the traditional liturgy fails to unite priest and laity in the exercise of their respective aspects of the priestly office, but because it fails to become a tool in the hands of the feminist for social change. Only in her version of the "Vatican II liturgy," which, as we shall see, is not the liturgy mandated by the Second Vatican Council, can the *lex orandi, lex credendi* be subverted to her personal agenda.

Counciliar Invention?

Furthermore, the idea of priest and laity, joined in the sacrificial offering of the Mass, was not invented by the Second Vatican Council. The statement in Section 10 of *Lumen Gentium*, "But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist," references a section of Pius XI's encyclical from 1928, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, on reparation to the Sacred Heart:

Wherefore with this most august Eucharistic Sacrifice there ought to be joined an oblation both of the ministers and of all the faithful, so that they also may "present themselves living sacrifices, holy, pleasing unto God" (Rom. 12:1). Nay more, St. Cyprian does not hesitate to affirm that "the Lord's sacrifice is not celebrated with legitimate sanctification, unless our oblation and sacrifice correspond to His passion" (Eph. 63). . . Nor do those only enjoy a participation in this mystic priesthood and in the office of satisfying and sacrificing, whom our Pontiff Christ Jesus uses as His ministers to offer up the clean oblation to God's Name in every place from the rising of the sun to the going down (Mal. 1:11), but the whole Christian people rightly called by the Prince of the Apostles "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9), ought to offer for sins both for itself and for all mankind (Cf. Heb. 5:3), in much the same manner as every priest and pontiff "taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God" (Heb. 5:1), (AAS 20 (1928) p.171. Cf. LG 10, note 3).

So the dynamic unity of priest and laity in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass is nothing new, certainly nothing novel to the Second Vatican Council. Further, it is clear enough that Sister Joan Chittister is not actually supporting this teaching at all when she says that in the "Vatican II liturgy" the "people and priest pray the Mass together." On the contrary, Sister is interested in using the liturgy for social change, something she will never find supported by the principles of Vatican II, governing the revision of the liturgy.

But what about the *motu proprio* and the permission for a wider use of the traditional liturgy, the Mass according to the Missal of John XXIII? Does the traditional Mass somehow undermine the participation of the laity in the Mass? Or what was the real purpose of Vatican II—according to the

documents, not according to the “spirits” of Vatican II—when it mandated the revision of the liturgy in view of “active participation” in the liturgy.

Active Participation

The key to answering these questions is the concept of “active participation.” The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council, links active participation to the baptismal priesthood:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Pet. 2:9, 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism (5).

Later in the same document the Council implies that the *active roles* in the liturgy are meant to promote active participation, and do not in themselves constitute it (30). In fact, the document of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, says that it is necessary for the faithful to understand the place they occupy in the “liturgical community” in order for them to actively participate consciously and fruitfully. In the same section, in order to assure that this aim is accomplished, the Congregation mandates a full catechetical explanation of the royal priesthood of all the faithful (11).

Unfortunately the spirits of Vatican II rarely make the connection between active participation and the royal priesthood of the faithful. Most Catholics have to be taught to believe what that active participation means, as Sister says:

The people and priest pray the Mass together, in common language, with a common theme. They interact with one another. They sing “a new church into being,” non-sexist, inclusive, centered together in the Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Galilee curing the sick, raising the dead, talking to women and inviting the Christian community to do the same.

They have not been told the truth about what the Council actually taught. Years ago, the author of the *motu proprio*, Cardinal Ratzinger as he was then called, answered questions about the liturgy:

. . .”The Council rightly reminded us that that liturgy also means *actio*, something done, and it demanded that the faithful be guaranteed an *actuosa participatio*, and active participation.” . . .

. . .”The concept is no doubt correct. But the way it has been applied following the Council has exhibited a fatal narrowing of perspective. The impression arose that there was only ‘active participation’ when there was discernible external activity—speaking, singing, preaching, reading, shaking hands. It was forgotten that the Council also included silence under *actuosa participatio*, for silence facilitates a really deep, personal participation, allowing us to listen inwardly to the Lord’s word. Many liturgies lack all trace of this silence” (Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985. 127).

But this is not only a question of whether liturgical action should be understood as to include both external activity and silence. In Latin both *activa* and *actuosa* mean “active;” however, there is an important difference. *Actuosa* is more nuanced than *activa*, because it indicates both a greater intensity of activity and moral participation. The Council uses the term *actuosa* relative to active participation in the liturgy. Thus, when the Council uses the term “active participation” it is talking about the royal priesthood of the faithful, by which all the baptized unite their whole lives in a contemplative manner to the sacrifice of Christ (Cf. Martin Edwards, “The Active Participation of the Faithful According to

the Recent Magisterium,” *Ministerial and Common Priesthood in the Eucharistic Celebration: The Proceedings of the Fourth International Colloquium of Historical, Canonical and Theological Studies on the Roman Catholic Liturgy*. London: CIEL UK, 1999. 122-126. Edwards quotes Cardinal Ratzinger as indicating that this term includes the notion of “a truly deep, personal participation,” 125).

Ecclesiastical Ghettoism?

With the release of *motu proprio*, permission has been granted for Mass to be said either according to the Missal of Paul VI or the Missal of John XXIII, the former being the “ordinary expression of the ‘Lex orandi’ (Law of prayer),” and the latter being the extraordinary expression of the same (SP, art. 1). The question to be considered at this point is whether a broader use of the Missal of John XXIII will somehow undermine the active participation of lay faithful in the Mass, as Sister asserts. She fears that this permission will so narrow the Church’s view, that the move will result in “ecclesiastical ghettoism.”

If one considers what active participation in the liturgy is, and how one engages in it, then it is not hard to see how Sisters “fears” are baseless. But, then again, as shown above, for her active participation is not at all what the Council says it is.

As noted above, the Council meant to foster active participation by permitting the use of the vernacular, by providing dialogue for the faithful in response to the prayers of the Mass, and by providing opportunities for the faithful to participate in the action of the liturgy, such as in the offertory procession. However, the Council never said that any of this *constitutes* active participation. All the action is only meant to *foster* active participation, which again is the exercise of the baptismal priesthood.

When this is considered without prejudice, then it is not hard to see why those who are attracted to the Traditional Mass are in every way finding the means to enter into this active participation. It may not be for everyone, but it would be foolish to suggest that the traditional Roman Rite is somehow handicapped relative to the participation of the faithful in the sacrifice of Christ.

The paradoxical thing is that it is precisely the attitude of Sister Joan that continues to make the Traditional Mass more appealing, not only to people who remember it as the Mass of their youth, but also to young people who are experiencing it for the first time. Hardly ecclesiastical ghettoism, when the Traditional rite is found attractive by many of those who are eager to believe and live the Faith of the Church. On the other hand, these same people, convicted as they are by the Faith or intuitively attracted to it, instinctively know that “singing a new church into being” is Modernist mumbo jumbo.

Unfortunately, more and more of those who have been attracted to the Traditional Mass are actually finding sanctuary there because they have been convinced that the Second Vatican Council was very much mistaken. They believe that the modernist indoctrination, exemplified by Sister’s liturgical theology, is the direct fruit of the Council’s teaching. Of course, it is not. But the misrepresentation has to end if the *Novus Ordo* is to be understood and celebrated correctly. The *motu proprio* will certainly be helpful in this regard.

The *Novus Ordo* can certainly be celebrated reverently and in a way that is consistent with the tradition. The changes mandated by the Council can foster active participation, and in fact do foster it, when the Missal of Paul VI is actually followed. (Say the black, do the red). One of the best ways for someone to sense a worthy and fruitful celebration of the new Mass is to have some awareness of the tradition as it has been embodied in the Traditional Roman Rite. The idea that the Mass of Vatican II is a part of a new liturgical and theological universe will be revealed as the bosh it is, as more and more people

become familiar with the Traditional Rite.

Transcendence or Transformation?

A fair minded reading of the actual Council documents provides an easy refutation of that idea that the Traditional Mass excludes the laity from the liturgical life of the Church, but what about Sister's assertion that it is anti-woman?

Remember the way Sister attached a "theology of transcendence" to the Traditional Mass, and a "theology of transformation" to the "Vatican II liturgy?" If you are confused, read "transcendence" as God-centered and "transformation" as man (politically correct term: human person) centered. Transcendent liturgy is about adoration and praise of God. Transformative liturgy is about social engineering. That should clear everything up.

If you were confused don't feel bad. The language is misleading. Don't all of us who go to Mass want to be transformed in some way? Don't we all want the Mass to lead to that transformation? Transcendence is only opposed to transformation if one has a view only to this world.

In fact, transcendence is anathema to the radical feminist, because it points to the Fatherhood and to the power of God. The traditional liturgy only alienates women if they have a problem with God the Father. That would only be the case, if they fail to accept that the transcendent God has willed to be present among us through His own humility, condescension and love.

Yes, humility and obedience are part and parcel of the royal priesthood—of all the faithful. The ordained minister, in respect to his own spiritual life has to practice it as well. In the end it is only sacrificial love, based on humility and obedience in imitation of Christ, which opens us up to the power of God and to the true needs of our neighbor.

To oppose transcendence and transformation in liturgical life is a perverse and false dichotomy. Christ makes all the baptized members of God's family. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and we are being brought little by little, if we cooperate, into a union with God, that is best described as "spousal."

In his apostolic letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II linked the royal priesthood of the faithful to woman, because she is the sign by which we identify Christ's spousal relationship with the Church. This he does in the context of commenting on Ephesians chapter 5 and Revelations 12, where he links the vocation of woman to Mary and the concept of spouse:

If the human being is entrusted by God to women in a particular way, does not this mean that Christ looks to them for the accomplishment of the "royal priesthood" (1 Pt 2:9), which is the treasure he has given to every individual? Christ, as the supreme and only priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, and as the Bridegroom of the Church, does not cease to submit this same inheritance to the Father through the Spirit, so that God may be "everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15:28). Then the truth that "the greatest of these is love" (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13) will have its definitive fulfillment (30).

In the same encyclical the Pope says that the "very heart of the Paschal Mystery" reveals "the spousal love of God." "The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride." The Holy Father states clearly that in reserving priestly service to men, Jesus wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is "feminine" and what is "masculine" (26). He did not, however, wish to exclude women from liturgical life, any more than He wished to exclude His very own Mother.

In other words, our active participation in the Mass, especially by way of Holy Communion, is

exemplified by spousal-maternal love, realized most perfectly in the Blessed Virgin, and this love is the necessary coefficient to the ministerial priesthood. Can any of this be rationally construed as anti-woman? I am sorry for sister, and women like her, who seem to hate their own femininity, a gift of God, a sign and a service to the whole Church.

Liturgy in Heaven and on Earth

Sister Joan Chittister is not the least bit ashamed to prefer a more “earthbound” liturgy to a heavenly one. And it is easy to understand why. In any case, this is another false dichotomy.

If one has no view to heaven, then one might as well be a pantheist. The liturgy as we know it, is in fact earthbound, in case you haven’t noticed. Just talk to a mother who has to wrangle with her two-year old in the church crying room, in case you have any doubt. However, it is *liturgy* precisely because the Sacrifice and Sacrament give us divine life and hope for eternity.

After forty years of liturgical pottery and felt banners, the smells and bells are just what the doctor ordered. The *motu proprio* is a good thing. It is even more necessary in the face of such persistent spirits of confusion.

Father Angelo Mary Geiger