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CONSECRATION OF THE WORLD AS LITURGICAL ACT

Abstract. This article intends to coordinate sacramental liturgy with the liturgy of life by interrelating a number of themes. Evident in the combination of topics in the theology is the typical Catholic approach of “both/and”: church and world, liturgy and the secular, mystagogy and evangelization, sacred and the profane, liturgical participation and mission, liturgical renewal and renewing the face of the earth. This article shows the new evangelization through the lens of liturgy. How does the new evangelization relate to history and eternity, cosmos and parousia, spiritual renewal and embodied action?

Key words: New evangelization; liturgy; world; consecration.

Several years ago Boguslaw Migut casually commented that some Catholics misinterpret the goal of the new evangelization by using the Protestant definition of preaching the gospel for the first time to convert people to Jesus. Such was not the idea John Paul II had when he first used the term in the 1983 document, *Redemptoris Missio*. In paragraph 30 he says, “Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed.” He identifies those challenges in paragraph 33 when he says that in both ancient and younger Churches “entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization’” (33). B. Migut, condensed this by describing the new

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evangelization as “the perfection of our baptismal identity.” The new evangelization consists of edifying and building up our baptismal identity until it floods all our daily life with a living sense of the faith.

I will pick up from there. Whereas the new evangelization is the perfection of our baptismal identity, and whereas baptism commences our liturgical career by making us liturgical apprentices to Christ, who is the premiere liturgist, I consider the new evangelization to be a liturgical subject. My thesis is that consecrating the world is a liturgical act that serves the new evangelization. In the face of secularization, our response is the perfection of the liturgical life we began when baptism gifted us with the call to consecrate the world. I am here thinking of the definition provided by Pope Paul VI when he writes, “let it suffice here to recall that by consecration we mean, not the separation of a thing from what is profane in order to reserve it exclusively, or particularly, for the Divinity, but, in a wider sense, the re-establishment of a thing’s relationship to God according to its own order, according to the exigency of the nature of the thing itself, in the plan willed by God.”¹ Our liturgical life initiated by baptism does not involve retreating from the secular world into sacred ghettos, it rather involves reestablishing all things in the world in a right relationship to God. My doctor father, Aidan Kavanagh, would define liturgy as “Doing the world the way the world was meant to be done.”

Baptism forgives and sanctifies, but it does not pickle someone in holy water to wait for judgment day. Rather, baptism initiates the spiritual warfare (which I have called “liturgical asceticism”) that is required for liturgy. Baptism is a sacrament of initiation: what does it initiate? In other words, into what should our faith grow?² While a person is in the sacramental water, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity are infused, but once we have these gifts we must still grow into them. Overseeing the growth to perfection of this baptismal grace occurs under the patronage of the new evangelization. Ultimately it is a liturgical identity, because the liturgy

¹ PAUL VI, “Layman Should Be World’s Perfect Citizen,” General Audience of April, 1969, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P6LAYMAN.HTM>

² Into what should our baptismal seed grow? It should *quicken* into wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (the gifts of the Holy Spirit). It should quicken into charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (the fruits of the Holy Spirit). These gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are signs of the new evangelization. Becoming a more lively spiritual person means becoming more saturated by the Holy Spirit. The new evangelization is faith, hope, and charity coming to plenitude.

glorifies God and sanctifies man, and when these two intersect, then the world is being consecrated.

John Paul II said the challenge the new evangelization should take up is the case of people who have “lost a living sense of the faith,” so I conclude that liturgically perfecting our baptism is a matter of making one’s faith more lively. And perhaps an older English term better communicates this idea. Our faith should *quicken*. (I apologize to the translators who must render the flavor of this word into Polish!) In English, that word has unfortunately been restricted to just a sense of acceleration, going faster. But the original term has a broader sense. *Quickening* means to give additional life, to make something lively and active. To move *quickly* is to move in a *quicken*ed manner. We should walk to heaven *quickly*, meaning, we should walk toward God with a faith that is full of motion, animated, lively and bright. In pregnancy terms, *quicken*ing is the moment when the woman starts to feel movements in the womb. We await the day of our final birth in beatitude, but faith is already a sensation of eternal life stirring within us, and we start to feel movements of faith within the womb of Mother Church. Faith is liturgical anticipation of the eschaton, which is why the Catechism defines faith as something that “makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision” (¶163). This is the light we taste in sacramental liturgy, which would *quicken*, enliven, brighten our journey to God if we experience our evangelization anew. The new evangelization is a matter of *quicken*ing our baptism.

The liturgical *habitus* planted in us by the sacramental water brings us face to face with the Paschal mystery in a regular and repetitive rhythm. We routinely step before God’s throne, from which the river of liturgy flows. And from the altar of the Lord we are carried by its liturgical current back into the world for the work of its consecration. With this liturgical capacity, we can use the world to glorify God. This comes at a cost, of course. The remains of the old Adam are still with us in the form of a concupiscence that weakens our powers, and subjects us to ignorance and the dominion of death (Catechism ¶418). That is why it is proper, in my opinion, to speak of a liturgical asceticism for all the baptized, not only for the monk. What is sown is not quickened except it dies, says Paul about the resurrected body (1 Cor 15:36), and that is also true of our death in the font and the rising that comes from it to daily liturgical life.

Except we die to the old Adam, we cannot be quickened in the new Adam. That is why the new evangelization involves ceaseless activity, as Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange describes.

Since the charity of a Christian should increase until death, any halt in its development is in opposition to the law of the love of God. This is the explanation of the expression used by several fathers of the Church: “in the way of salvation, he who does not advance, goes back.” If life does not ascend, it descends. The soul cannot live without love. If it fails to make progress in the love of God, it falls back into self-love.³

Because of the tender mercy of our God, the Dawn from on high guides our feet into the path of peace, and we are expected to progress along this path, not stand stock-still on it. If we do not advance and ascend, we fail the new evangelization. If we do not make progress in the love of God, we fail the new evangelization. So we must not think of our liturgical life as a state of complacency. It rather consists of the circulation we undergo between the altar and the mundane.

God has placed a “teleological ought” into all things: the seed ought to sprout, the branch ought to bloom, the flower ought to bear fruit. We ought to pass from childhood to youth, and youth to manhood, and then from biological life to spiritual life. To stop growing is death. Stop up a river’s flow and it becomes a stagnant swamp; stop up the world’s orientation to God and it becomes worldly; stop up the temporal within its own horizon and it becomes the secular. The Dead Sea is dead because it has no outlet. The new evangelization creates one. Our liturgical existence consists of glorifying God by bringing our life in the world back to the altar on the next eighth day as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and glory. We are not pulled out of the world like a tooth is pulled out of its socket; that is the error of a Gnostic spirituality that never learned how to make peace between spirit and soul, eternity and time, heaven and earth. To the contrary, a liturgical spirituality discovers that it can use the world for liturgical purposes, namely, to glorify God and sanctify man. The Gospel proclaims that the Logos did not disdain taking on human flesh, and he made such peace with it that he could raise it from the dead to accompany his ascension to the right hand of the Father. We receive a share of that peace when we are baptized into Christ’s existence in order to live it ourselves. Thus we have peace between our soul and body, our spirit and the world, because the great Christ himself has given it to us himself. His incarnation has changed the symbolism of the world.

³³ Reginald GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1945), 189.

Olivier Clement observes that the ancient Greeks used to split a coin, or a ring, and when the two separated halves were joined together again it was a true meeting. This is the etymological root of the word symbol, from $\sigma\upsilon\mu\beta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\omega$ [*sym+ballō*], “to throw together.” He writes,

In Christ the world is joined together again in symbol, in a profusion of symbols. The invisible part appears in the visible: the visible draws its meaning from the invisible. ... The world is a vast incarnation which the fall of the human race tries to contradict. The *diabolos*, the opposite of the *symbolon*, is continually trying to keep apart the separated halves of the ring; but they come together in Christ. Christian symbolism expresses nothing less than the union in Christ of the divine and the human—of which the cosmos becomes the dialogue—displaying the circulation in Christ of glory between ‘earth’ and ‘heaven,’ between the visible and the invisible.⁴

What was inconceivable to the philosophers was conceived in the womb of the Theotokos: God in the flesh. As a result, cosmos becomes the dialogue between the visible and the invisible, the cosmos becomes sacramental and sacrificial, the cosmos becomes raw material for Eucharist. The new evangelization consists of living in a symbolic world; it consists of drawing the meaning of the visible world from the approaching Kingdom. This is what the secular world fails to do; worldliness is taking the world without reference to God. But the new evangelization is liberation from the diabolical one who tries to keep apart heaven and earth. The new evangelization displays the liturgical circulation of glory in a consecrated world. We make our liturgical glorification of God by using material cosmos. In what was a scandal to religious expectation, God kenotically bowed the heavens to earth and hypostatically united divine nature and human nature. Therefore we may consecrate the world. This was precisely the priestly activity for which Adam and Eve were created, the priestly activity that the diabolical one confounded in us, and the priestly activity that is restored to us when we are baptized into the second Adam.

To experience the new evangelization is to now live in a symbolic and not a diabolic world. The new evangelization is a perfection of life restored, life regenerated, a world re-consecrated. The world can be a place of dialogue between the invisible and the visible if grace will open our eyes and unstop our ears and make them liturgical organs again. To consecrate reestablishes a relationship between creation and the Uncreated One, said Paul VI. How

⁴ Olivier CLEMENT, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (New York: New City Press, 1996), 219.

much of creation? All of it, says Benedict XVI when he summarizes *Lumen Gentium* 4–7. These paragraphs describe the inner reason for the Church’s existence, because they

are concerned with holiness, that is, *with what is fitting for God*—in order that space may be made in the world for God, so that he may dwell therein and the world may thus become his “kingdom”. Holiness is more than a moral quality. *It is the dwelling of God* with men, of men with God, the setting of God’s “tabernacle” with us and among us (John 1:14) this involves a new birth.⁵
[Emphasis added]

What is fitting for God? Everything. Anything. (Except sin.) Where can God dwell? Everywhere. Anywhere. (Except with sin.) He can even dwell in the valley of the shadow of death, which we know because he spent thirty-three years in it with us. He does not disdain to tabernacle with us in that valley a little longer. And then we discover how different the world feels when the Christ child is in the manger, instead of having it empty. It becomes an occasion for dialogue with God as it enjoys its consecration.

The world does not have to become worldly. The world only becomes worldly if we take it without reference to God. The *saeculum*, the time period for today’s generation, does not have to become secular. Time only becomes worldly if we take it without reference to eternity. Worldliness and secularism only results when we take some plot of cosmos and some parcel of time without reference to God. They result when we treat matter and time non-liturgically, non-sacramentally, non-theophanically, non-sacrificially, non-eucharistically. Since that is a corruption of sin, even the New Testament speaks of the world in two ways. Alexander Schmemmann writes,

We seem to forget that in the New Testament and in the whole Christian tradition the “world” is the object of two apparently contradicting attitudes: an emphatic acceptance, a *yes*, but also an equally emphatic rejection, a *no*. “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son (John 3:16) and then – “do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him” (John 2:15).⁶

How does the world become worldly and the *saeculum* become secular? When it lacks liturgy, when it is not consecrated to God, when it is reserved

⁵ Joseph RATZINGER, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: the Church As Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 149.

⁶ Alexander SCHMEMMANN, “Prayer, Liturgy, and Renewal,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 14 (1969), 1 (Spring): 8.

to ourselves, when it is taken as an end in itself—which is a dead-end. Gregory the Great therefore traces the origin of worldliness to the heart of the wicked.

For the wicked, while they neglect in their hearts to go on to the things of eternity, and do not observe that all things present are fleeting, fix their hearts on the love of the present life, and as it were therein construct for themselves the foundation of a long abode, because by desire they are established in earthly things. ... For one may see great numbers minding temporal things alone, seeking after honors, open-mouthed after the encompassing of good things, looking out for nothing after this life.⁷

This is secularism: fixing one's heart on the love of the present life and minding temporal things alone. It is life without liturgy. There is no reason that a unit of time cannot be related to God; there is every reason that it should be related to God. It only becomes what we mean by "secular" when we fix our hearts on the temporary goods that it contains. Time becomes secularism when time is not consecrated; the world becomes worldly when cosmos is not consecrated.

What might God do to remedy this? If God were not to abandon created matter and created time to start over again, what would He do to redeem the situation? He would have to use a sacramental dynamic to reshape lives with eternal and immortal power. He would have to dynamite whatever had dammed up the intended outlet of matter, and world, and cosmos, and time. He would have to reintroduce the Eucharistic circulation so that our life did not pool up into a dead, secularized sea. He would have to counter the sclerotic hardening of the human heart. He would have to restore the suppleness of earth and time until they became agile enough to join the flight of angels. He would have to bend heaven down to kiss earth, and empower earth to rise up and kiss heaven. He would have to plant a bright flag in the dark shadowland to stop a secular world from closing in upon itself (it would be the flag of His resurrection). He would have to empty a tomb so that all who saw it would realize that death does not conquer true life.

What more? He would have to create a people to live as witnesses, and if their light grew dim he would have to renew their evangelization. He would have to quicken their faith to shine the light of hope in perfected charity. He would not place this people on some sacred shelf; He would populate the earth with them as a sign of life. He would not satisfy them yet. That would

⁷ GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia in Job* (South Bend, IN: Ex Fontibus Company, 2015), 224.

come later. For the time being, He would make their spiritual life a hunger and thirst, and the new evangelization would be felt in the form of desire. The seed would begin to sprout. The new evangelization would be an increase of that desire so this people would be attracted with increasing speed to the Kingdom of God. And, like a magnet, they would bring the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve with them.

This *ekklesia* will be called together not in abandonment of the world, but to carry world and culture and history and philosophy and society and *polis* and *ethos* to the very throne of the Lamb, as described in Revelations 5. On the last day they will lay before the King all the personal reality they have constructed with the time allotted them. But—amazing to say—this begins already. It is the liturgy trickling from heaven to moisten dry bones. It is the liturgy of the Lamb penetrating every aspect of these people’s lives. That is why *Lumen Gentium* 34 describes them as linked to Christ’s mission and anointed by the Holy Spirit. As a result, they consecrate the world in which they live, and all their “works, prayers, and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation” become spiritual sacrifices. “Together with the offering of the Lord’s body, [these things] are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the *laity consecrate the world itself to God.*”⁸

This is the description of a liturgical people who partake in a new evangelical reality that is transforming the world. This is the very purpose of liturgy, says Schmemmann.

For in liturgical worship we are not only put ‘in contact’ with God, but are given the vision of the Kingdom of God, as fulfillment in Him of all that exists, of all that He has created for Himself, and also we are made partakers of that new Reality. And having seen and tasted of the ‘heaven and earth as full of His glory’ we are then to relate all life, all activity, all time to this vision and experience, to judge and to transform our life by it. Thus the very ‘other-worldliness’ of the liturgy makes it a real power of transformation in ‘this world.’⁹

This is the description of a liturgical people whose new evangelization would transform this world. Grace is the seed of glory, and glory is grace quickened.

⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 34. Emphasis added.

⁹ Alexander SCHMEMMANN, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America, II the Liturgical Problem,” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 8 (1964), 4: 171.

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KONSEKRACJA ŚWIATA JAKO AKT LITURGICZNY

Streszczenie

Artykuł ma na celu koordynację liturgii sakralnej z liturgią życia, łącząc wiele tematów. Wyraźne w połączeniu tematów z teologii jest typowe podejście katolickie „zarówno / i”: Kościół i świat, liturgia i świecka, mistagogia i ewangelizacja, święte i profanacyjne uczestnictwo liturgiczne i misja, odnawianie liturgiczne i odnowienie twarzy na Ziemi. Artykuł ten ukazuje nową ewangelizację poprzez socjologię liturgii. Jak nowa ewangelizacja nawiązuje do historii i wieczności, kosmosu i paruzji, odnowy duchowej i ucieleśnionego działania?

Słowa kluczowe: Nowa ewangelizacja; liturgia; świat; uświęcenie.