

Idols and Icons: Reflections on the Current State of Liturgical Reform

John F. Baldovin SJ

I am delighted to take part in this colloquium on the ‘Worship wars’. At times people have strong reactions to the notion that Catholic can be at war over worship, but I think that the current situation warrants this kind of language. If one has any familiarity with the Internet on these matters, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that a very serious battle is being fought for the soul of the Catholic Church and that this battle takes its most visible form in debates about the liturgy. Given the number of books that seem to appear weekly criticizing the sad state of the reform, given the difficulties that have been raised by Pope Benedict’s liberalization of the use of the pre-Vatican II rite, and (at least especially in the United States at present) the concerns over the viability of the new translation of the liturgy into English, it seems to me that ‘Worship wars’ is a very apt title indeed. Clearly a number of people are dissatisfied with Catholic liturgy as it is. But that dissatisfaction is not all of one sort.

I will venture to argue that we can put Catholics into four broad categories vis-à-vis the reform. First, there are those (perhaps the vast majority of those who actually participate in Sunday Eucharist on a regular basis) who are basically satisfied with the reform of the liturgy. They like the liturgy in the vernacular, the experience of a community gathered around an altar (at least ‘gathered around’ in some sense of the phrase) and the engagement of the priest presider. A much smaller group (I think – this is not a scientific survey but rather somewhat impressionistic) consists of those who never accepted the liturgical reform in the first place and have been accommodated by Pope Benedict XVI’s liberalization of the use of the pre-Vatican II Roman Rite.

The third and fourth groups are somewhat more complex for they consist of people who are dissatisfied with the current state of the reform – but for different reasons. The first of these groups can be characterized by the slogan ‘Reform of the Reform’. These are people who do not wish simply to return to the pre-Vatican II liturgy.¹ In general they accept the vision of the Council’s *Constitution on the liturgy*, but they are very unhappy with the reform as it unfolded especially from 1964-1974, when most of the reformed rites were produced. They are even less satisfied with the pastoral implementation of that reform.

¹ For a survey, see J.F. BALDOVIN: *Reforming the liturgy: a response to the critics* (Collegeville 2008). For some examples of this type of critic, see A. NICHOLS: *Looking at liturgy: a critical view of its contemporary form* (San Francisco 1996); TH. KOCIK (ed.): *The reform of the reform? A liturgical debate: reform or return?* (San Francisco 2003).

This group would like a return to something like the Roman Rite Eucharist as it was celebrated around 1965, when few of the Council's prescriptions had been adopted. It is safe to say that Pope Benedict XVI belongs in this group as is clear from his desire that the newer and older 'uses' of the Roman Rite influence one another, and from his numerous writings on liturgy that preceded his election as pope.

A final group is dissatisfied with the reform for a completely different set of reasons. These people see the liturgy as reformed in the decades after the Council as a fairly good start but one which has not gone nearly far enough. This last group can be subdivided, for it would include people coming at the reform from a number of different angles. There are those who think there should be much more inculturation of the liturgy, e.g. more movement or inclusion of the dynamic equivalents of various rites. There are those who are critical of perceived gender imbalance in the liturgy whether it be 'horizontal' liturgical language or language about God or the principles of selection employed for the lectionary or the gender of liturgical ministers. There are others who are dissatisfied with the state of the liturgical translations of the first generation of the reform and who seek a more elegant liturgical vernacular, one that is represented in English at least by the texts translated in the 1980's and 90's as well as by the original texts produced by ICEL (International Commission on English in the Liturgy) in the same time period. And finally there are those who think that the basic understanding of the liturgy has been poorly digested – that the majority of (even active) Catholics do not appreciate the communal and corporate dimensions of Christian worship.² For the sake of transparency, I should admit that I find myself most in sympathy with these latter two groups – those who hope for a somewhat more elevated language and better produced set of liturgical texts and those who think that the spiritual and theological dimensions of the liturgy reform leave much to be desired.

In this essay my primary focus will be on the critique of the 'reform of the reform', especially as represented by three recent Italian authors: Mauro Gagliardi, Claudio Crescimanno and Nicola Bux,³ and a Hungarian musicologist, writing in English, Laszlo Dobzsay.⁴ I will begin, however, by reviewing Jean-Luc Marion's distinction between idols and icons and then I will apply the distinction to two of the most fundamental issues in the contemporary debate: first, what is the nature of the Roman Rite and how shall one talk about its

² The latter issue – the spiritual dimension or interiorization of the reform has been well developed by M.F. MANNION: 'The catholicity of the liturgy: shaping a new agenda', in S. CALDECOTT (ed.): *Beyond the prosaic* (Edinburgh 1998) 11-48.

³ M. GAGLIARDI: *Liturgia fonte di vita: prospettive teologiche* (Verona 2009); C. CRESCIMANNO: *La riforma della riforma liturgica: Ipotesi per un 'nuovo' rito della messa sulle tracce del pensiero di Joseph Ratzinger* (Verona 2009); N. BUX: *La riforma di Benedetto XVI: la liturgia tra innovazione e tradizione* (Casale Monferrato 2008).

⁴ L. DOBSZAY: *The restoration and organic development of the Roman Rite* (London 2010).

organic development? And second, how shall we understand the role of the ordained priest in Eucharistic celebration?

1. Idols and icons

One of the major contributions that the French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion makes in his works *The idol and distance*⁵ and *God without being*⁶ is the distinction between the idol and the icon. At the outset I should admit that Marion uses the differentiation to deal specifically with the concept of 'being', which he will find lacking as the primary category of dealing with God. In the end, his analysis will lead him to Pseudo-Dionysius, especially Dionysius' treatment of the Divine Names, and the primacy of 'love'. All the same, I think his analysis of the difference between idol and icon can be useful to us in discerning attitudes toward the liturgy.

Marion is not speaking about two different sorts of things or two different categories of phenomena when he talks about idols and icons. Rather he is describing two ways of looking at phenomena – and thus he is describing attitudes. 'The icon and the idol *determine two manners of being* for beings, not two classes of being'.⁷ Fundamentally the difference between idol and icon can be characterized as the difference between opacity and transparency. The idol is opaque. It does not lead beyond itself but rather transfixes and absorbs the gaze of the beholder. It enchants. Ironically it also becomes a kind of mirror. But Marion insists that this is an invisible mirror. 'The idol masks the mirror because it fills the gaze'.⁸ It is like the myth of Narcissus, who is unaware that by gazing into the water, he is falling in love with himself. This notion of the idol as mirror will be a key concept for my own analysis for the current state of liturgical reform, since I find a paradoxical kind of narcissism in certain attitudes toward the liturgy, which think they are arguing for more transcendence at the same time as they are promoting an idolatrous attitude toward the liturgy itself.

The icon, on the other hand, represents a completely different approach. As Marion puts it: 'The icon does not result from a vision but provokes one ... (it) summons sight in letting the visible be saturated little by little with the invisible'.⁹ He sums the matter up this way: 'In the idol the gaze of man is frozen in

⁵ J.-L. MARION: *The idol and distance: five studies* (= Perspectives in continental philosophy 17) (New York 2001; translated in English by Thomas Carlson; original ed. 1997).

⁶ J.-L. MARION: *God without being: hors-texte* (Chicago 1991; translated in English by Thomas Carlson; original ed. 1982).

⁷ MARION: *God without being* 8; emphasis mine.

⁸ MARION: *God without being* 12.

⁹ MARION: *God without being* 17.

its mirror; in the icon, the gaze of man is lost in the invisible gaze that visibly envisages him'.¹⁰ I want to make the following suggestion: Isn't the function of the icon precisely that of the liturgy – where the first emphasis rests on what God is doing in summoning us, convoking us, making us into the Body of Christ – and where we become caught up in that divine gift? I think this is precisely where the fundamental debate about liturgy has to be. I find it fascinating that Laurence Hemming, in his foreword to Dobszay's recent book *The restoration and organic development of the Roman Rite*, makes precisely this point about recognizing liturgy as a gift from God, but comes to such radically different conclusions from me with regard to the importance of the liturgical assembly.¹¹

As I intimated earlier, Marion proceeds to use the distinction between the idol and the icon to deconstruct the traditional metaphysical notion of God. I will not pursue his analysis further except to say that his category of gift is of the utmost importance for any useful liturgical/sacramental theology today.

2. The Roman Rite

At this point I will turn to the area that constitutes the focus of my own analysis: the idea of the Roman Rite itself and of its organic development. As anyone who has read Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI as well as any number of proponents (Klaus Gamber, Alcuin Reid, Thomas Kocik, Aidan Nichols) of the so-called 'reform of the reform' knows, a major objection to the post Vatican II reform is that it deviated from *Sacrosanctum Concilium's* requirement that the reform be 'organic'. The pertinent paragraph is no. 23:

That sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress. Careful investigation is always to be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised. This investigation should be theological, historical, and pastoral. Also the general laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy must be studied in conjunction with the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and from the indults conceded to various places. Finally, there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.

The criticism of the work of the post-conciliar *Consilium* for the implementation of the *Constitution on the liturgy* is that it broke too radically with the Catholic tradition and that it ended up with an artificial concoction that was merely the fantasy of some 'experts'.¹² One of the most trenchant critiques was launched

¹⁰ MARION: *God without being* 20.

¹¹ E.L. HEMMING: 'Foreword', in DOBSZAY: *Restoration* IX-XIX.

¹² CRESCIMANNO: *Riforma* 127.

by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in a number of places. A quotation from his preface to Klaus Gamber's *The reform of the Roman liturgy* will suffice. There he wrote:

What happened after the Council was (...) fabricated liturgy. We abandoned the organic, loving process of growth and development over the centuries, and replaced it – as in a manufacturing process – with a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot-product.¹³

Two brief observations here. Now that he is pope, it is difficult to imagine that Benedict will allow this 'fabricated' liturgy to remain unchanged. Second, it seems rather disingenuous to argue that a gradual and organic development of the liturgy took place between the first printing of the *Roman Missal* in the 15th century (virtually the Tridentine Rite) and the 1960's, when it was precisely the frozenness of the rite that inspired the calls for its radical reform.

Let me outline the argument that the post-conciliar reform of the liturgical broke radically with tradition and therefore betrayed the wishes of the Council. As the critics see it, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* warranted a limited reform of the liturgy as described in paragraph no. 23 above. The Council did not envision the translation of the whole of the liturgy into the vernaculars but rather some parts, like the readings and a restored prayer of the faithful.¹⁴ Nor did it foresee radical changes in the structure of the Eucharistic liturgy, the Divine Office or any of the sacramental rites. According to this narrative the *Missal of Paul VI* (1969-1970) was a radical and abrupt departure from tradition as was the *Liturgy of the Hours* promulgated in 1972. The criticism was severe on a number of points:

- The insertion of more than one Eucharistic prayer into the missal.
- The translation of the Eucharistic prayer as well as the presidential prayers of the priest.
- The elimination of many of the introductory prayers, the so-called prayers at the foot of the altar.
- The elimination of most of the old offertory prayers in favor of the two blessing formulas patterned on Jewish prayer-forms.
- The re-organization of the liturgical year and especially the elimination of the *Septuagesima* season preparing for Lent.
- The replacement of the venerable annual cycle of epistles and gospels with a three year cycle that included a large number of readings from the Old Testament.

In addition, of course, a number of significant changes had preceded the *Missal of Paul VI*:

- The insistence on a free standing altar in each church so that the priest might face the people in the celebration (1964).

¹³ Ratzinger, as cited in HEMMING: 'Foreword' XVIII.

¹⁴ SC 54.

- The permission to substitute other apt musical pieces for the traditional chants of the Roman Rite Eucharist (1967).

Now it would be disingenuous to argue that this reform (and I am speaking just of the Eucharistic liturgy for the moment) was anything other than radical. Much of the subsequent debate has centered on whether a type of reform that better accommodated a modern mentality was appropriate and whether it too abruptly departed from tradition.

Criticism of the post-conciliar liturgical reform was further abetted by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia in which he clearly takes sides in the debate about the interpretation of Vatican II. In this talk the pope made a distinction between a hermeneutics of rupture which saw the Council as radically departing from tradition and a hermeneutics of continuity by which the Council could be judged firmly in line with tradition. In my opinion the dichotomy described by the pope is a chimera, i.e. a product of the imagination. No self-respecting Roman Catholic could argue seriously for a hermeneutic of rupture, at least as Benedict seems to describe it. That would be tantamount, to denying the value of the apostolicity and catholicity of the Church. No, what is really at issue is the understanding of tradition itself. I would claim that an exclusive concern with the content of tradition at the expense of understanding the process of tradition is the equivalent of Marion's idol. I think that Benedict may be dangerously close to the traditionalism so well described by Jaroslav Pelikan, when he wrote that 'Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living'.¹⁵ When one denies the reality (or the seriousness) of the discontinuities of tradition, one becomes transfixed, mesmerized by the content of tradition itself at any stage in its development. I've tried to show elsewhere,¹⁶ that there are considerable changes in the history of the liturgy, East and West, and that even when the text of the liturgy changes, its social and cultural context changes so significantly (take just the Baroque Era for one example) that the meaning of the liturgy is transformed. So – historical change is a major aspect of tradition itself. Otherwise one is left with what Pelikan calls 'the dead faith of the living'.

At issue here are two major factors in contemporary thought: historicity and culture. One of the most important legacies of the Enlightenment is the recognition that history matters. In other words, that significant changes have actually taken place over time, that change and development really do occur. In an important essay Bernard Lonergan described this phenomenon as historicity and argued that this view of the world differs radically from what he called the

¹⁵ J. PELIKAN: *The Christian tradition*. Vol. 1: The emergence of the Catholic tradition (100-600) (Chicago 1971) 9.

¹⁶ J.F. BALDOVIN: 'Reflections on *Summorum Pontificum*', in *Worship* 83 (2009) 98-112 and IDEM: '*Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the reform of the liturgy: 45 years later', in *Studia liturgica* 39 (2009) 145-157.

‘classical’ worldview in which truth remains fundamentally static.¹⁷ Now those who espouse the classical worldview clearly do not dismiss history. They appeal to it a great deal, but only to show its basic continuities. The historicist worldview, on the other hand, is willing to take account both of continuity and discontinuity within history. Let’s take the creation of the *Septuagesima* season as an example. The gradual addition of three Sundays to the beginning of Lent (roughly the fiftieth, sixtieth and seventieth days or *Quinquagesima*, *Sexagesima* and *Septuagesima* Sundays) occurred during the 6th and 7th centuries as a kind of reaction to increasing threats to Roman Society, either by plague or foreign invasion. One can easily see this in the choice of an introit psalm for *Septuagesima*: *Circumdederunt me gemitus mortis* – ‘the groans of death surround me’ (*Psaum* 17, 5). Now, one could certainly make the case that easing slowly into Lent, as the Byzantine Rite does with its Sundays that bid farewell to meat and then to dairy products (their Lenten fast is extremely strict), makes good sense. At the same time the architects of the post-conciliar rite wanted to clarify the structure of the liturgical year and thus to let the beginning of Lent stand out as a time for penance (Ash Wednesday) and for preparation for the Easter sacraments (the enrollment of candidates on the 1st Sunday of Lent). The understanding of the creation of the *Septuagesima* season as culturally and historically conditioned allowed them to do this.

I will call historicity the longitudinal or vertical aspect of our topic. But there is also a horizontal aspect – that of culture. In a few well-known essay, actually a talk presented in 1899, the British liturgical historian, Edmund Bishop, described what he called *The genius of the Roman Rite*. (That essay was so influential that – like Cardinal Ratzinger’s adoption of Guardini’s title *The Spirit of the liturgy* – *The genius of the Roman Rite* has been borrowed by not one but two books just in the past year.)¹⁸ In *The genius of the Roman Rite* Bishop argues that the original Roman Rite, that is the pre-Carolingian Rite of the city that was imported North of the Alps in the course of the 8th century, can best be characterized by two words: ‘sobriety’ and ‘sense’.¹⁹ He comes to this conclusion after comparing the very different styles of Roman and Franco-German (or Gallican) prayers. The latter are florid and convoluted, betraying a significantly different religious attitude from the prayers that come from Rome itself. Bishop similarly contrasts the ceremonial style of Rome with its relatively spare ceremonial with the embellishments, for example in the use of incense, that were native to the North. As is well known, the liturgical books that contained Franco-German elements eventually found their way back to Rome and were incorporated into the liturgy of the Roman Curia which became the template for printed liturgical books and therefore the 16th century *Missal of Pius V*. Now, I think it is safe to

¹⁷ B. LONERGAN: ‘The transition from a classicist worldview to historical-mindedness’, in *A second collection* (London 1974) 1-15.

¹⁸ By Uwe Michael Lang and by Keith Pecklers.

¹⁹ E. BISHOP: ‘The genius of the Roman Rite’, in IDEM: *Liturgica historica* (Oxford 1918) 19.

say that the Gallican and Roman prayers and style of ceremonial are neither better nor worse than one another. They are simply different. In addition, Yitzhak Hen has recently argued that these prayers and styles peacefully coexisted for some time in the Merovingian and Carolingian periods.²⁰

Bishop does not use the term, but it seems to me that what he is describing is what we would call ‘inculturation’ today. In a very fertile period of cultural interchange the Roman Rite was transformed significantly. It seems to me that whether one calls that kind of change ‘organic’ or ‘inorganic’ is very much in the eyes of the beholder. I would say that the process of tradition in the Roman Rite includes a significant amount of change both vertically (that is, over time) and horizontally (that is, across cultures).

Now, the desire to undertake a significant reform of the liturgy – a process begun with the *Liturgy Constitution* – was not the result of a number of ‘armchair scholars’ playing with the liturgy and trying to impose some sort of fantasized archaeology on the Christian people. That is a favorite argument of the critics. It was rather the recognition by pastors (admittedly with the aid of a century and more of solid historical-critical research) that 20th century culture and society had changed so much, that the venerable Roman Rite needed a great deal of reform and renewal if it was to serve the glorification of God and the sanctification of men and women. It was, to use the terms I developed in the first part, an attempt to recover the liturgy’s iconicity by letting it be more transparent for contemporary Christians.

I fear that the insistence on retaining many of the traditions of the Roman Rite (like the ‘eastward’ position in prayer and Latin for significant portions of the Eucharist, or the sole use of the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), or even the traditional euchology of the *Roman Missal*), tends in the direction of worshipping the Roman Rite instead of the Trinitarian God. Lest I be misunderstood, I need to insist that I do not consider the traditional Roman Rite to be idolatrous (that would surely constitute a hermeneutic of rupture), but rather that the attitude of insisting on it or a return to many of its features *à la* the ‘reform of the reform’ is idolatrous in the way I suggested in the introduction. Simply put, the tradition is not the object of our worship. Moreover, the tradition itself is best understood as a dynamic process rather than a corpus fixed in time.

Let me expand a bit on what I mean by ‘the traditional euchology of the Roman Rite’. It is no secret that the *Consilium* which produced the *Missal of Paul VI* had a difficult time choosing from the corpus of Collects, Prayers over the gifts and Prayers after communion. The Medieval series of the *Latin corpus scriptorum christianorum* has a large number of volumes (thirteen, I think) filled with these prayers. But part of the problem is that they tend not to be very biblical in in-

²⁰ Y. HEN: *The royal patronage of liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the death of Charles the Bald (877)* (Woodbridge 2001).

spiration and are filled with language like *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus*, which is not necessarily the best way to communicate the message of the Gospel to contemporary men and women. (Of course a good number of the traditional prayers that were adopted for the *Missal of Paul VI* are excellent monuments to Christian faith.) But since much of this euchology lacked biblical resonance the International Commission on English in the Liturgy included original texts in its 1973 translation of the *Roman Missal*. The Italians had already included lectionary-inspired collects in their current missal. ICEL had proposed a similar series of biblically inspired prayers for the three-year cycle in the *Sacramentary*, that all of its member conferences voted overwhelmingly to submit for *recognitio* in 1997. As we know from the difficult history of the past decade, these prayers along with the whole proposed translation were rejected by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Given the development of a huge corpus of presidential prayers in the Roman Rite over centuries, I can only regard it as profoundly untraditional that original texts are not being included in the forthcoming edition of the *Sacramentary* in English.

Before moving on to the last two examples: Eucharistic sacrifice and the role of the ordained minister, I should state clearly that, given the logic of what I have been trying to argue, idolatry is certainly not limited to those who want to hold on to a traditionalist image of the Roman Rite. It seems to me that this is a game everyone can play – progressives as well as conservatives. Even progressive or reformed liturgical rites can be the object of our idolatrous gaze. This is why we always need to be reminded that the first meaning of *Leitourgia* (well translated by the word *Gottesdienst*) is God's work for us and then only our human work in response to the divine gift.

3. The role of the priest

One can hardly give due attention to the question of liturgical reform without also considering the role of the ordained priest in liturgical celebration. So many practical concerns – like the position of the priest at the altar and the posture of the assembly – are related to how we understand the priest theologically. Here, to return to Ratzinger's critique cited earlier, one has to recognize certain schizophrenia in the Council's documents. When one reads the later documents (as the conciliar historian, Massimo Faggioli, has observed), one can detect a certain lack of follow-through on the importance of the active participation of the assembled faithful in the liturgical action in favor of one that distances the priest from the laity. Such distinction between the roles of priest and laity has become even more radical in more recent magisterial documents, for example the 1980 *Holy Thursday Letter* of John Paul II (*Dominicae Cenaë*), the subsequent

instruction of the CDWDS, *Inaestimabile Donum*, John Paul's encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and another CDWDS instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2003).²¹

I should make clear, presenting the issue of priesthood in terms of Marion's distinction between idols and icons is somewhat ironic. One of the more surprising, if not troubling, aspects of *God without being* is Marion's treatment of the bishop as theologian. In this section of his book, Marion argues on the basis of his interpretation of the Emmaus story of *Luke* 24 that the celebration of the Eucharist is what he calls the 'hermeneutic site of theology'.²² This approach is fully consistent with his insistence on the gift character of revelation and the primacy of love over being as a theological category. He is thinking here of the bishop as the priest *par excellence*, the Church's primary deputed person in the Eucharistic celebration. He writes:

(...) if finally only the celebrant receives authority to go beyond the word as far as the Word, because he alone finds himself invested by the persona Christi, then one must conclude that only the bishops merits, in the full sense, the title of theologian (...) Only the saintly person knows whereof he speaks in theology, only he that a bishop delegates knows whereof he speaks.²³

In the sense that theology, like any experience of God, must ultimately be received with humility, I find myself in complete agreement with Marion. At the same time, it seems to me that he puts himself in danger of sanctioning a kind of idolatry of the priesthood. At least, one needs to recognize that the same distinction between idolatry and iconicity needs to be applied to the priesthood as to theology itself as well as to the liturgy.

I will enlist the help of another conservative Italian liturgist, Don Nicola Bux, in outlining a common understanding of the role of the priest. Bux is a significant voice, because he serves as consultor for several important Vatican congregations. Like Mauro Gagliardi and a number of others, Bux blames the anthropological turn of theologians like Karl Rahner for making the liturgy into a human product rather than a mystery received from God. A prime manifestation of this error according to Bux is the priest turned toward the people in the Eucharistic celebration. – This is not the place to defend Karl Rahner's orthodoxy, but it seems to me beyond dispute that Rahner was thoroughly orthodox in the content of his theology, no matter how one might want to debate his method. (In fact Gagliardi goes even further than Bux in tracing the problem with theological method to 'Transcendental Thomism's emphasis on judgment

²¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_24021980_dominicae-cenae_en.html;

http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0821/_INDEX.HTM;

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html.

²² MARION: *God without being* 152.

²³ MARION: *God without being* 153 and 155.

over concepts in epistemology.)²⁴ – So, for these theologians a theology of the priesthood that stems somehow from the anthropological turn will be deficient. By the same token a theology that proceeds epistemologically from below will not find a welcome hearing. It is at this level that one has to acknowledge a parting of the ways in theology. In my opinion a theology which begins with metaphysical principles has no credibility. It is only when we appreciate the process of how one comes to faith, how one experiences discipleship, that we have a theology that can speak to our contemporaries. (This is what the British theologian, James Alison, calls the ‘order of discovery’.) I find that very often critics like Bux and Gagliardi mistake a theology whose method starts, as it were, from below with ‘low’ or deficient doctrinal assertions. I do not believe this is the case. One must, if one is to be an orthodox Catholic, adhere to doctrinal formulations which are high: the divinity of Christ, the priority of grace, the *ex opere operato* character of the sacraments and so forth. On the other hand, as I think Rahner among modern theologians has demonstrated superbly, it is possible to reach traditionally orthodox conclusions by means of a method which begins with human experience.

I hope that the last few minutes have not seemed like a wandering excursus for there is no way to get at the contemporary debate over the nature of the priesthood without dealing with some fundamental questions of theological methodology. Here, then, is Bux’s basic outline of the question of the sacramental role of the priest. Following Ratzinger and Balthasar, he claims that the primary two characteristics of liturgy, adoration and sacrifice, have been relativized by a contemporary rationalism in theology; a rationalism which favors liturgy as the communication of a message rather than a ritual experience of God. In fact, there is some truth to the claim that for many the liturgy has become the opportunity to communicate a message at the expense of a communal experience of the Paschal Mystery, but that is not the fault of the priest facing the people, as theologians like Bux would have it. There are so much other factors which I will mention later. The result for Bux et al. is that the priest has become a kind of exhibitionist.²⁵ As opposed to this, Bux appeals to the post-institution narrative portion of Eucharistic Prayer II with its: ‘We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and serve you’ (new proposed translation: ‘Giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you’). Bux interprets this venerable phrase from the *Apostolic Tradition* to mean that the priest stands before God on behalf of the people. The ‘we’ in the passage could possibly have originally referred to the bishop as the formula was offered as a particular example of Eucharistic praying in the context of the ordination of a bishop. On the other hand, since the use of the plural in Eucharistic prayers most often refers to the assembly, it may not refer specifically to the bishop (priest) at all. In any case, I think that resting a theo-

²⁴ GAGLIARDI: *Liturgia fonte di vita* 58ff.

²⁵ BUX: *La riforma* 93.

logical argument on the fragile basis of one phrase from a Eucharistic Prayer is risky business. Bux is on firmer ground, however, when he cites the *General instruction of the Roman Missal* (no 93):

93. A priest also, who possesses within the Church the power of Holy Orders to offer sacrifice in the person of Christ,⁸¹ stands for this reason at the head of the faithful people gathered together here and now, presides over their prayer, proclaims the message of salvation to them, associates the people with himself in the offering of sacrifice through Christ in the Holy Spirit to God the Father, gives his brothers and sisters the Bread of eternal life, and partakes of it with them. When he celebrates the Eucharist, therefore, he must serve God and the people with dignity and humility, and by his bearing and by the way he says the divine words he must convey to the faithful the living presence of Christ.

Much depends here on the phrase ‘associates the people with himself in the offering of sacrifice through Christ in the Holy Spirit to God the Father’. In what sense can the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice by the people be different from the priest who presides? Frequently an appeal is made to the Council of Trent’s *Decree on Eucharistic Sacrifice* which states that Christ made his apostles priests of the new covenant when He instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper.²⁶ It is difficult, I think, to have any familiarity with responsible contemporary biblical exegesis and repeat what Trent said without qualification.

One can see some nuance in Trent’s connection of the institution of the Eucharist with the establishment of priesthood in Vatican II’s treatment of ordained ministry, both in *Lumen gentium* (19-21) and *Presbyterorum ordinis* (1-3). In fact the latter document tries to balance the representational character of the ordained ministry with regard to the fact that the ordained are, after all, members of Christ’s priestly people. Theologically the question comes down to this: is the priesthood of the ordained somehow independently established from the common priesthood of the baptized? I do not believe that Scripture gives us much help here. The Bible is often clearly misused – for example when the treatment of Christ’s priesthood in the *Letter to the Hebrews* is employed to talk about the ordained ministry. There are other grounds for establishing the necessity of ordained ministry than asserting that Christ somehow established an independent ministerial priesthood. For example, one can argue from the necessity of individuals to guarantee the Church’s unity and continuity, or from the prophetic need to preach the Word, or from the need for pastoral care. And so one can also speak legitimately of the priest acting *in persona Christi capitis* and still be faithful to the insight provided by the Catechism (no 1746), when it asserts that the service of the common priesthood is the rationale for the ministerial priesthood.

I want to suggest that it is only when we can construct a theology of the ministerial priesthood that is truly consistent with the common priesthood of the

²⁶ DS 1742.

baptized that the *Liturgy Constitution's* vision of the communal nature of our liturgical celebration can be realized fully. What is this common priesthood if not our being joined to the priesthood of Christ in offering the world back to the Father in faith, hope, and love? And what is the ordained priesthood if not the valuable, yes, necessary support of that glorious task?

The alternative hypostatization of the ministerial priesthood leads, I think, to the kind of idolatrous possibilities that I have tried to argue with regard to the Roman Rite and Eucharistic sacrifice. The 'invisible mirror' of the priesthood as idol can lead us to be mesmerized instead of being invited into a deeper engagement with the mission of Christ.

4. Conclusion

The underlying thesis of this paper has been that the progress of the contemporary Catholic reform of the liturgy requires us to address some very difficult questions; questions that relate to the nature of tradition, its transmission and its reception. I have attempted to do this with the help of Jean-Luc Marion's distinction between idols and icons in the hope of constructing a more solid response to the conservative critics of the reform. I applied that distinction to the Roman Rite itself and made a theological application to the question of the ministerial priesthood.

Critics like Dobszay, Hemming, Crescimanno, Gagliardi and Bux are convinced that the current state of the Roman Rite – in what it is somewhat disingenuously called its 'ordinary form' – is not a suitable way forward for the Catholic Church. They wish to return to the 1962 edition of the *Roman Missal* and work from there. Pope Benedict XVI seems to want a mutual influence between what he has called the ordinary and extraordinary forms. I hope that I have been able to suggest persuasively that yearning for a return to the pre-conciliar Roman Rite moves in the direction of turning our worship into idolatry, that has the liturgy itself as its model. On the other hand, the way to be drawn into the mystery of divine life, I would suggest, lies with our reverent engagement with the post-Vatican II liturgy as it continues to unfold.

John Baldovin SJ (1947) is professor of historical and liturgical theology at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. He is a former president of the *Societas liturgica*.

E-mail: frbaldov@bc.edu.