

ABSTRACT

The term Liturgical Theology marks a fundamental paradigm shift and change of direction in the field of liturgical research. Whereas in the past, the theological subject matter coined as “Liturgics” was arbitrarily reduced to the study of the Typikon and of the history of rituals, and confined to a solitary niche apart from the other theological disciplines, at present it has become an unabridged interdisciplinary aggregate of Dogmatics, Patristics, History and Spirituality. The Liturgical Theology is thus self-defined as *Theologia Prima*, i.e. the source of all theology, for its roots probe deeply into the heart of the Holy Liturgy, from whence the entire theological discourse of the Church stems.

The phrase 'Liturgical Theology' proposes to define precisely this new integral and integrative vision of the ontological unity between all theological disciplines that ought to keep the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church as their source. The Liturgy of the Church is more than a set of liturgical rituals or acts. It represents the source and root of all theological expression and it states as properly as possible the unity and coherence of Christ's new life in the bosom of His Church. Both the confessed and the experienced dogma are in accord with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is in accord with the doctrine, as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons stated. In other words, in the life of the Church “*Lex credendi est lex orandi*” and “*Lex orandi lex est credendi*”.

The problematics analysed by this theological subject matter is clustered around three major points, namely: a. Defining the work method, b. Rethinking and questioning the way in which the Eucharistic Anaphora emerged and evolved, c. Outlining a new vast and profound interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of the Holy Liturgy ritual.

a. Comparative Liturgics is one of the novel work methods employed by the Liturgical Theology. This trend in liturgical research that appeared at the beginning of the XXth century was theorized by F. Cabrol (1855-1937) and also notably by Anton Baumstark (1872-1948). It was then undertaken by F. Hamm, H. Engberding and the members of the Liturgical School at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome: Juan Mateos (1917-2003), Robert Taft (b. 1932) or Gabrielle Winkler (b. 1940). In Baumstark's formulation, which was inspired from comparative linguistics and biology, the evolution of rituals followed the general tendency from the initial variety and simplicity, to the late uniformity and rhetorical prolixity, a tendency occasionally interrupted by retrograde inclinations towards local variations and abbreviations. Baumstark and his followers have even formulated a series of “laws” that were meant to assist the future liturgical research in its difficult task of comparing and analysing the various liturgical manuscripts.

The current Liturgical Theology has been able to implement the principles and methods laid down by the school for Comparative Liturgics into an extremely modern interdisciplinary context, i.e. in the search for and analysis of the similarities between the Eucharistic texts and the works of the Holy Fathers, which was done with the aid of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* digital database.

b. As far as the history of the Liturgy is concerned, the modern Liturgical Theology has sought to change the blueprint for its interpretation, to question the old theories and then to try and find new solutions. Both explanatory tendencies that decipher the evolution of the Eucharistic text - the one following the development from unity and uniformity to diversity (Probst, Bickell, Duchesne, Vintilescu, Branîște), and the one marking the evolution from diversity to homogeneity (Baumstark, Taft, Bradshaw, Spinks) - seem to be mutually exclusive. Dix has attempted to synthesize these two opinions by postulating a fundamental distinction between the general structure of the Eucharistic ritual and the actual content of the eucharological text. That has allowed him to admit to an initial existence of many Eucharistic formulas that, although different, were all structured on the general scheme of an unfolding syntax in the Primary Church.

There is a universal consensus among researchers who consider Birkat Hamazon to have served

as the origin or the model upon which the text of the Eucharistic Anaphora was configured. Obviously, this supposition is met by a series of difficulties, for it is known that during the first century of the Christian era, there were no written euchological formulas either in the Judaic cult or in the Christian one. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a prototype-text according to which all the subsequent Eucharistic formulas were configured.

The great merit of the Romanian Liturgical Theology is that of having emphasized the primacy of an “ecclesial” reception and comprehension of the Eucharistic texts, wherein the unity is not annulled by the diversity of expression and formulation. Within this process of evolution, each Eucharistic text represents an individuality that belongs to a specific ritualistic time, space, and context. The mystical unexpected values and hidden meanings of each and every Anaphora can be uncovered only by integrating and understanding this process in terms of the ritualistic experience of the Church.

c. The interpretation of the Liturgy by means of an interdisciplinary approach is one of the main ambitions of the modern Liturgical Theology. The ritual of the Holy Liturgy can be understood and experienced in all of its depth and uniqueness only through the corroboration of the data provided by the Dogmatic Theology, Church History, Moral Theology, and by the Christian Spirituality and Asceticism. Such an interdisciplinary approach is the sole guarantee for reconciliation between the two main directions in the interpretation of the Holy Liturgy, i.e. the anagogy and the Antiochian typological symbolism, and the eschatological Alexandrian realism. In this respect, Father Dumitru Stăniloae's complex interdisciplinary view of the Holy Liturgy manages to encompass synthetically these two interpretation trends, while he genuinely imprints the consistency of the eschatological Alexandrian realism onto the Antiochian typological symbolism. In his opinion, the enacted rituals of the Church could be icons of the Saviour's life, for it is in them and through them that Christ's Person - in Which all the events of His life are in a state of permanent currentness - is present and active.

The Liturgy is the locus of communion between man and God, where Christ makes Himself present and available in various degrees and under many forms, all of which are inseparable and complementary, and constitute the means by which the faithful share in God's love, and in the grace of His eternal Kingdom. Yet the Holy Eucharist brings about the consummate sharing in Christ's sublime love. With the Communion, the man receives in his inmost essence the Originator of grace, the Son of God Who stands before the Father in a perpetual state of Self-sacrifice, continuously pouring His compassionate heart out for all humanity. Christ's sacrificial state is the celestial foundation of the Eucharistic Liturgy here on earth. Its purpose is to enable the man to truly participate in His perennial sacrifice, and to sacrifice himself, just as Christ did, by dying to the egotistical pleasures of this world and living a life filled with selflessness and with the Self-giving of the deified humanity of the Son of God. Holding this belief at their core, the Eastern Orthodox Christians know that, in order to approach Christ's pure sacrifice, they must undergo an ascetic preparation that is absolutely necessary for them, as it enables them to feel, understand, and get a taste of the profoundness of Christ's Self-giving in the Eucharist of the Church. Suffused by this compassionate love, the man is called to participate in a Liturgy after the Liturgy, which is an opportunity for him to enact the gifts received, for the sake of reiterating Christ's whole life both sacramentally and ethically.

The liturgical ascent towards the high pinnacle of Eucharistic communion is aided by the communing with Christ through His Word, also through the chants and prayers of the priest and the faithful, and by the priest's cutting of particles for the living and the dead, which symbolize equally as many meetings and unions with Christ, as well as maturations in the communion with Him and with all the Church members. For all Christians, the Eucharistic-sacramental Communion is the starting point towards a perpetual spiritual communion with Christ. This is accomplished through the observance and fulfilment of His Word and commandments, and also through extensive prayer that empowers them to activate the gifts they received, to become aware of Christ's presence, and to unite with Him sacramentally, ethically, and ascetically.