

THE LITURGICAL EXPERIENCE: BEAUTY AND TRANSCENDENCE

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Introduction

The liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, height of Christian worship, “the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed (...) and fount from which all her power flows”², is a synthesis and apex of religious expression in its diverse aspects. The powerful experience within in the Liturgy, which culminates in mystical union in the Eucharist, arouses a consideration of the celebration in its artistic and transcendental dimension. It encompasses not only the spiritual faculties, the understanding and the will, but also the sensitive faculties: internal and external senses, passions and affections.³ Clearly, the liturgical act employs diverse means of communication that encompass the entire human person,⁴ in a celebration of the Divine. It is at once a moment of festive exultation in which the faithful speak through, words, music and gestures, while at the same time a moment of silent contemplation, an ecstasy of admiration and awe, wherein the spirit is receptive to Divine communications. The course of the liturgical celebration encompasses time, space and symbolic forms that harmonize in a synthesis of beauty. It constitutes, at the same time, the greatest mystical journey possible in the human experience, leading to a destination of mystical union in Communion.

In this epoch of pragmatism, industrialization and globalization, the Liturgy takes on a new dimension as a reservoir of *pulchrum*, intense symbolism and call to transcendence. If a “world without beauty” — today’s world — is immersed in conflict and horror, one finds within the liturgical celebration an oasis of the true expression of *verum* and *bonum* in a harmonious contemplation of beauty. The Liturgy, regardless of its accidental transform-

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2) Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10

3) VAGAGGINI, Cipriano. El sentido teológico de la liturgia. Madrid: BAC, 1959. p. 278.

4) BENEDICT XVI. Sacramentum Caritatis, 40. <Available in: www.vatican.va> [Consulted: 19 Mar., 2009]

ations throughout the ages, has persistently remained a bulwark of the transcendental in the human experience. In its symbolism and mystical composition, it fulfils the complex needs of the human soul, in its invariable search for the Absolute.

1. Beauty and symbolism in the liturgy

1.1 Liturgical beauty

The Liturgy, *veritatis splendor*, is intrinsically associated with beauty.⁵ Beauty has a unique ability to attract and open the human spirit, in a more effective way than abstract ideas or doctrines. Navone⁶ speaks of our incapacity to live without beauty, manifested in the most basic needs of the mind and heart. He emphasizes beauty as a call to transcendence, for that which attracts us by its beauty and goodness, implicitly calls us beyond, to a beauty and goodness even greater.⁷ The Eucharistic Celebration, in its resplendent conjugation of sights, sounds and smells, is an efficacious instrument in captivating the human spirit, attracting it through beauty to the Supreme Good. In it, contrasting elements are harmoniously combined: words and silence, gesture and stillness, light and darkness. In the beauty of the mysteries celebrated, man experiences *pulchrum*, as the splendour of *verum* and *bonum*. Clearly, a consideration of the beauty within the Liturgy brings to light some metaphysical aspects. The Concluding document of the General Assembly, *Via Pulchritudinis*, points out the role of beauty in its relation to the true and the good.

Beauty itself cannot be reduced to simple pleasure of the senses: this would be to deprive it of its universality, its supreme value, which is transcendent. Perception requires an education, for beauty is only authentic in its link to the truth — of what would brilliance be, if not truth? - and it is at the same time ‘the visible expression of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical expression of beauty’.⁸

5) *Ibid.*, n. 35.

6) NAVONE, John J. *Em busca de uma teologia da beleza*. São Paulo: Paulus, 1999. p. 41.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 83.

8) CONCLUDING DOCUMENT of the General Assembly. *The Via Pulchritudinis*, II.I. Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue. [On line]. <Available in: <http://www.vatican.va>> [Consulted: 25 Nov., 2008]

Since Kant, philosophy has, to a great extent, reduced the conception of beauty to a merely subjective element, depriving it of its ontological dimension. However, according to the *philosophia perennis*, beauty is a transcendental property of being; that is, a perfection found in all things, without exception. According to Saint Thomas,⁹ the transcendentals are *unum, bonum, verum, pulchrum* — unity, goodness, truth, and beauty. When a being is what it should be, that is, when it possesses truth in its essence, it is also good, and, depending on the sphere to which it belongs, beautiful, holy, noble and useful.¹⁰ Since the transcendentals are aspects of being, they form a union with it, so inseparable among themselves that the lack of care with one would be a catastrophe for the others, as Von Balthasar¹¹ points out.

Plato called beauty the splendour of truth, and Saint Augustine defined it as the splendour of order.¹² In the Thomistic vision it is seen as the splendour of truth and goodness.¹³ For Saint Thomas, beauty is the synthesis of three fundamental qualities, “Beauty includes three conditions, *integrity* or *perfection* (...); due *proportion* or *harmony*; and lastly, *brightness*, or *clarity*”.¹⁴ Integrity is related to unity, proportion to goodness, and clarity to truth. The Greek word for beautiful, *kalos*, interestingly comes from the Greek verb *kaleo*, which means, “to call”. The beautiful, the good, attracts us evoking happiness and delight.¹⁵ The Greek philosophers, conscious of the relationship between the good and the beautiful, combined the two concepts in one phrase: *kalokagathía*, or beauty-goodness. “On this point Plato writes: ‘The power of the Good has taken refuge in the nature of the Beautiful’”.¹⁶ Beauty is then, the centre of all motivation, decision and human action, for we do not act without being motivated by the attractiveness of a specific good.¹⁷

9) NICOLAS, Marie-Joseph. Vocabulário da S. T. In: Suma Teológica. 2a.ed. São Paulo: Loyola, 2003. p. 101.

10) STEIN, Edith. Ser finito y ser eterno: ensayo de una ascensión al sentido del ser. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 334.

11) VON BALTHASAR, Hans Urs. Gloria. Una estética teológica. La percepción de la forma. Madrid: Encuentro, 1985. p.15.

12) PANELLA, Federico L. La Belleza en la Liturgia. In: Phase. Barcelona. No .253, 2003. p. 9.

13) FORTE, Bruno. A porta da beleza: por uma estética teológica. Aparecida: Idéias & Letras, 2006. p. 34-35.

14) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, I q.39, a.8.

15) NAVONE, Op Cit., p. 83.

16) JOHN PAUL II. Letter to Artists, 3 [On line]. <Available in: www.vatican.va> [Consulted: Mar. 19, 2009]

17) NAVONE, Op. Cit., p. 40.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar¹⁸ affirmed that in a world without beauty, the good loses its force of attraction, and truth, its cogency. He bases his profound reflection on beauty in the consideration of God as the font of all beauty, and all created beauty as a reflection of this beauty. Beauty is not just an external form; rather it is a light that radiates from within, an exterior form of the interior. Something is beautiful when it radiates splendour, the reverberation of a hidden light, the splendour of being. The synthesis of the truth and good produce a light that infiltrate to the exterior, an illumination that attracts and fascinates. Von Balthasar¹⁹ employs the terms *kabôd*, *dóxa*, *glória* as synonymous of this beauty, for this scriptural term defines this luminosity that is a manifestation of the Divine splendour. “Beauty is the word that shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect has the courage to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained brilliance around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another”.²⁰

The manifold interpretations of beauty throughout the ages enrich our perspective in a consideration of its multifaceted role within the human experience. What becomes insistently clear is that beauty intrinsically moves the entire person “spirit and heart, intelligence and reason, creative capacity and imagination”.²¹ Beauty has the capacity to lower the barriers of our egoism in such a way that when we are touched by it, we are overcome and liberated from our selfishness as though from a prison. With the barriers of egoism struck down, one leaves oneself, and in this liberation comes an ecstasy in which one gives oneself, not in an oppressive way, but as a true donation of oneself. It possesses a dynamism that fulfils the deepest of human yearnings for it invites one to leave the transient and ordinary, to rise to the Transcendent and Mystery, ultimately seeking the source of all beauty, God.²²

The beauty of the Liturgy is a beauty that transcends us.²³ It is a beauty that speaks through the simplicity and originality of its symbols, but also through the splendour and nobility of its ritual. It is a beauty that is revealed gradually,

18) VON BALTHASAR, Op. Cit., p. 23.

19) Ibid., p. 40.

20) VON BALTHASAR, Op. Cit., p. 22. (Personal translation).

21) CONCLUDING DOCUMENT of the General Assembly, Op. Cit. II.3.

22) Ibid., II.3.

23) MARINI, Piero. Liturgy and Beauty. [On line]. <Available in: www.vatican.va> [Consulted: 19 Mar., 2009]

demanding time and attentiveness to be entirely disclosed. It is a beauty that leads to contemplation through the synthesis of its diverse manifestations. It cannot be denied that within the Liturgy the aesthetic sentiment and activity is copiously engaged in the music, choreography, art and architecture.²⁴ The timeless passage of Saint Augustine seems to reflect the yearnings of contemporary man, aptly fulfilled in the multiple dimensions of the liturgical experience, in which the five senses are touched and overcome by the experience of Beauty so ancient, Beauty so new.

Late have I loved You, O Beauty so ancient, O Beauty so new, too late have I loved You! Behold, You were within me and I was outside, and it was there that I sought You. Deformed as I was, I ran after those beautiful things that You have made. You were with me, but I was not with You, for those things kept me far from You, which, unless they existed in You, would have no being. You have called. You have cried out and pierced my deafness. You have poured forth Your light. You have shone forth and dispelled my blindness. You have sent forth Your fragrance, and I have inhaled and panted after You. I have tasted You, and I hunger and thirst for You. You have touched me, and I am inflamed with the desire for your peace.²⁵

Liturgical beauty is truly an epiphany of the true and the good in today's world, lifting man in his entirety to transcend the physical realities. Particularly through its symbolism, the Liturgy manifests its splendour and diversity.

1.2. Liturgical symbolism

Man, in his essence, is a rational being,²⁶ composed of body and soul, inseparable material and spirit.²⁷ Saint Thomas²⁸ emphasized the ability of man to grasp the intelligible through the tangible, for our knowledge begins through the senses — *nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* —

24) VAGAGGINI, Op. Cit., p. 289.

25) SAINT AUGUSTINE. On Christian Doctrine. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952. p. 297-298.

26) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS. Summa Theologica I q.25, a.6 and q.28, a.3.

27) ARISTOTLES. De Anima. L. II, lección IV. Cited by SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS. Comentario al "libro del Alma" de Aristóteles. Buenos Aires: Fundación Arché, 1979. p. 170.

28) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica I, q.1, a.9.

to reach a superior level, that of abstraction.²⁹ He demonstrates the intrinsic role of the senses in relation to the intellect. “Though the intellect is superior to the senses, nevertheless in a manner it receives from the senses, and its first and principal objects are founded in sensible things. And therefore suspension of the senses necessarily involves a hindrance to the judgment of the intellect”.³⁰ In order to captivate the whole person, the unfolding of the Liturgy depends largely on external signs and symbols.

The senses, above all hearing, sight, smell and touch, are affected by symbolic language. In a first moment, by the beauty of the materialized, of created things, in order to afterward find their meaning in the light of the supreme Beauty, foundation and author of all of the others.³¹ Accordingly, Dionysius affirms, “we are led by sensible figures to the Divine contemplations, as is possible to us”.³² The symbolic forms are not an end in themselves; rather their mission is to clarify the contents of the transcendental conception.³³ It can be said, from the anthropological perspective of the sacred, that from the *homo symbolicus* one visualizes the *homo religiosus*,³⁴ for man is religious in his very nature. Liturgical symbolism is a bridge between the corporal and spiritual, visible and invisible, human and Divine. It aids in putting the human being in contact with the Divine, not in an abstract theoretical manner; but rather, in a vital and lucid way. Saint Thomas³⁵ explains how the human mind needs to be led by the hand by sensible things in order to be joined to God, because as the Apostle demonstrates in Romans 1, the invisible realities are perceived by the understanding of created things. That is why certain material things are used in the worship of God, so that through them, the human spirit may be moved to spiritual acts by which it is united to God. Therefore, religion possesses, it is true, certain interior acts, but also external acts, which are, as it were, secondary and ordered to the interior acts.

29) KOYRÉ, Alexandre. Estudios de la historia del pensamiento científico. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1977. p. 33.

30) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica I, q. 84 a. 8.

31) FORTE, Op. Cit., p. 12.

32) DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE. Ecclesiastical Hierarchy. Caput. 1, Section 2. [On line] <Available in: [http:// www.-texts.com/chr/dio/index.htm](http://www.-texts.com/chr/dio/index.htm)> [Consulted: Apr. 21, 2009].

33) OCAMPO, Estela. Apolo y la máscara: la estética occidental frente a las prácticas artísticas de otras culturas. Barcelona: Icaria, 1985. p. 54.

34) RIES, Julien. Tratado de antropología de lo sagrado. Madrid: Trotta, 2005. p. 9-14.

35) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica II II, q. 81 a. 7.

The liturgical act combines elements of creation and human artistic expression. It is a harmony of both the Divine and human elements of creation; “fruit of the vine, and work of human hands”.

All of creation, humans included, are set in right relationship by the celebration of liturgical rites themselves which by their nature combine the goods of earth with human articulation of praise, thanks and supplication. Christian liturgy holds up the earth, especially its primal elements, and combines them with human speech to proclaim God’s revelation. The God we address, revere and invoke in liturgy is the God of creation.³⁶

This harmonious synthesis of the elements of the universe touches man who is himself a microcosm³⁷ — containing vegetable, animal and mineral elements — through identification with the cosmos. Through liturgical inspiration, stones are employed in architectural forms, precious metals, fire, water, light, incense, flowers, and above all, bread and wine are used as instruments of Christ’s sanctifying action. Dionysius the Areopagite enlightens the idea of Liturgy, expressing it as a singing with the choir of creatures and entering into cosmic reality. Much more than a merely ecclesiastical celebration, it is our union with the language of all creatures. “He says: God cannot be spoken of in an abstract way; speaking of God is always — “*ymnein*”, singing for God with the great hymn of the creatures which is reflected and made concrete in liturgical praise”.³⁸

The past with its history, and the present with its realities, human and divine, visible and invisible, are evoked by the Liturgy.³⁹ The Liturgy is called to be offered up to the Creator through the actions of the body, sound of the voice, and the harmony of all of the senses.⁴⁰ It is the ideal place for the epiphany of beauty, where God is perfectly glorified, and man entirely sanctified. Embellished by symbolic and artistic expression, the Eucharistic celebration brings the faithful to express the mystery of Christ and the true nature of the Church, both human and Divine. “In her the human is directed and sub-

36) IRWIN, Kevin W. Liturgical Actio: sacramentality, eschatology and ecology. In: Questions Liturgiques. Leuven. Vol. 81 (2000/1); p. 177.

37) PHILIPON, M. O sentido do eterno. São Paulo: Flamboyant, 1964. p. 18.

38) BENEDICT XVI. General Audience. St. Peter’s Square Wed., May 14, 2008 [On Line]. Available in: <http://www.vatican.va> [Consulted: 4 Jul., 2009]

39) VON HILDEBRAND, Dietrich. Liturgia e Personalità. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1948. p. 45.

40) ELLIOT, Peter. Guía práctica de la liturgia. 4a. ed. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2004. p. 28.

ordinated to the Divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek”⁴¹. Various symbolic dimensions of the liturgical act will be examined, in light of their significance and importance within the celebration.

2. Transcendence and beauty in liturgical symbolism

2.1. Communal act

According to Saint Thomas,⁴² man is a social animal with numerous necessities, principally, the mutual support of other human beings. “*Simile similibus gaudet*” — the similar pleases that which is similar — according to the Latin expression. Man is fulfilled in his relationship with others, for he senses mutual similarities; the same human nature and a common origin and destiny, despite accidental differences. One of the most essential and profound traits of the Liturgy is its characteristic of being a social prayer,⁴³ where the social instinct is aptly heeded in the cohesive structure of the celebration. The partaking in a meal has always been considered to be an element in strengthening the unity and harmony among participants. The Latin word *convivium* refers to a banquet. The Eucharistic celebration is the *sacrum convivium par excellence*, in which the faithful together partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, becoming one in Him. “This sacramental ‘mysticism’ is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. (...) Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself”.⁴⁴

The congregation is a gathering from all levels of society, in a public, exterior expression of worship. Chrysostom⁴⁵ speaks of the social character of the Liturgy, in which one altar unites all without exception — rich and poor, slave and freeman. The gathering together and interaction of a community of the faithful is in itself a sensible sign of the invisible relationship that exists

41) Sacrosanctum Concilium, 2

42) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica II-II, q. 129, a.6; Suma contra los gentiles. L. III, c.128.

43) VON HILDEBRAND, Op. Cit., p. 23.

44) BENEDICT XVI. Deus Caritas Est. 14 <Available in: www.vatican.va> [Consulted: March 19, 2009]

45) CHRYSOSTOM III, 753d. Cited by: BETRAM, Jerome. The Meaning of the Altar in the Sacred Liturgy. In: Altar and Sacrifice. London. (1997); p. 74.

among them as a mystical body. “It is not just any assembly, rather, it is a convocation in Jesus Christ, an *ekklesia*... a sensitive sign of an invisible state”.⁴⁶ Liturgy, *ληιτων εργον* (*publicum opus, munus, ministerium*) is originally from the Greek term concerning a public act performed for the common interest of all citizens. The Liturgy, commonly defined as an action of the people, is a collective experience in which the participants see and hear one another in a continual act of praise. “The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves”.⁴⁷

The Eucharistic celebration typifies the unity of the body of the faithful not only in its ceremony — readings, hymns, offerings, procession, communion, kiss of peace — but also in its ancient formulas that consider all of the faithful, the communion of saints, outside of time and space.⁴⁸ Saint Thomas⁴⁹ insists on this communal aspect, emphasizing that the sacrament of the Eucharist calls for a more general devotion, on the part of all the people, since it is offered for them. The rubrics of the Eucharistic celebration are in their very essence of a communal nature, with intervals of active and passive participation. Together the faithful are witnesses and participants in the sequence of the liturgical act, which culminates in the partaking of “one Bread, one Body”.

2.2. Sacred art and architecture

The liturgical celebration is the privileged place of union between faith and beauty, in its vast artistic expression. The arts of time (poetry, music) and the arts of space (painting, images, architecture) unite during the Eucharistic celebration. The ambience created by the art forms — architecture, stained glass windows, paintings, sculptures, vestments, unite as a backdrop for the ceremony of the liturgical act, elevating the human being in his entirety in a continual act of contemplation and praise.

Art, as born of the spirit, is in itself of a spiritual nature.⁵⁰ By its very nature, art stimulates the intrinsic openness of man toward God. In both art

46) VAGAGGINI, Op. Cit., p. 47-48.

47) ARENDT, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. p. 50.

48) RIGHETTI, Mario. *Historia de la liturgia*. [On line]. <Available in: <http://www.bibliotheka.org/?/ver/40322>> [Consulted: 17 Mar., 2009]

49) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*. III, Op. Cit. q. 83 a. 4.

50) HEGEL. G.W.F. *Lecciones de estética*. Barcelona: Nova Grafik, 1989. p. 18.

and Liturgy, man desires to express the inexpressible; to make visible that which is invisible, to experience the sublime, to bring out the ineffable.⁵¹ Art opens the conscience to the Absolute, and impels the soul toward the worship of God in spirit and in truth. “Artistic beauty provokes interior emotion, it silently arouses astonishment and leads to an ‘exit from self,’ an ecstasy”.⁵² From time immemorial, art has accompanied and expressed the deepest emotions of the human experience. Humanity, now as always, looks to works of art to enlighten its route and its future. It transmits, in colour and forms, that which is of the spiritual, invisible world, making the interior sentiments of the human spirit tangible and accessible. The language of faith has multiple facets; the liturgical rite, gesture and the icon are forms of language with a clearly poetic dimension.⁵³

Art is, in addition, a unifying element, connecting body and spirit; the conscious with the unconscious. It constitutes a profound presence within the place of worship, transmitting more than words themselves, for its universal capacity of communication is more extensive. This capacity of communication is vividly seen in the paintings, images and stained glass windows that portray numerous biblical scenes, as the *Biblia pauperum*, accessible and understood by all.⁵⁴ Christian art is by nature symbolic. “Its beauty is characterised by a capacity to move from the interior ‘for self’ to that of the ‘more than self’”.⁵⁵ The *pulchrum* manifested in diverse forms of sacred art, is truly the splendour of the *verum* and *bonum*, manifested in substantial terms. The Liturgy and sacred art are together a cohesive reality, in which the latter manifests the glory of the former.

The diverse liturgical vestments, which communicate the dynamism of the liturgical calendar through their colour and form, are also of consideration within the realm of sacred art, with their emblematic and ceremonial manifestation. Colour, a visual element that has its own pedagogy, manifests universal and timeless messages of human existence throughout all cultures and epochs. Not only do colours contain a symbolic connotation, but they also

51) MATTHEUWS, Gino. The ‘Ars Celebrandi’ of the Liturgical congregation: Some Forgotten Dimensions. In: Questions Liturgiques. Leuven. Vol. 83 (2002); p. 132.

52) CONCLUDING DOCUMENT of the General Assembly, Op. Cit., III. 2.

53) MALDONADO, Luís. Sentido estético y sentido celebrativo. In: Phase. Barcelona. No. 253 (2003); p. 33.

54) MÂLE, Emile. L’Art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France. France: Librairie Armand Colin. 1958. 271p. p. 11.

55) CONCLUDING DOCUMENT of the General Assembly, Op. Cit., II.2

influence human psychology, affecting emotions and stimulating reactions. Among all of the visual elements of the liturgical celebration, the liturgical colours are the most universal and expressive, specifically in the symbolic language of the vestments, through which they act as an exterior manifestation of the religious sentiments during particular feasts. This allows for an increased consonance of the faithful with the liturgical celebrations throughout the year, when the colours communicate and instruct, imparting sentiments of penance or celebration.⁵⁶ This is vividly expressed in the use of white vestments during the Easter season, denoting the joy of the Resurrection after the use of purple at the Lenten period of penance, or the use of pink in the *Gaudete* Sunday, emphasizing an attitude of happiness and hope. The vestments communicate splendour and nobility to the ceremonies, as a complement to the readings, chants, and prayers. They are a unique form of art peculiar to the Liturgy, and a timeless representation of the glory of the celebration.

Architecture is a form of art with perhaps the greatest significance in the liturgical experience. The church or cathedral is profoundly significant in human worship, as Saint Thomas explains:

Men are corporeal beings: and for their sake there was need for a special tabernacle or temple to be set up for the worship of God, for two reasons. First, that through coming together with the thought that the place was set aside for the worship of God, they might approach thither with greater reverence. Secondly, that certain things relating to the excellence of Christ's Divine or human nature might be signified by the arrangement of various details in such temple or tabernacle.⁵⁷

In crossing the threshold of the church, the individual is wholly integrated into an ambience distinct from the common, symbolically passing from the world to a foretaste of paradise, the Celestial Jerusalem. It is a sacred space separated from the banalities of the exterior world, an organized microcosm, elevating the spirit toward the mysteries to be celebrated.⁵⁸ The symbolism of the entrance portal as the Gateway to Heaven and the Church as a vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the gothic cathedral was reinforced by verses inscribed on the doors of medieval cathedrals in which the faithful

56) ALDAZÁBAL, José. Gestos y símbolos. Barcelona: Centro de Pastoral Litúrgica, 2000. p. 51

57) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica I-II, Op. Cit., q. 102 a. 4.

58) PASTRO, Claudio. O Deus da beleza: a educação através da beleza. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2008. p. 69.

were encouraged to “illuminate the mind so that it might travel through the true door”.⁵⁹ Churches were always more specifically places of contemplation than action. The very etymology of the word temple, a root of the Latin word for contemplation, *cum+templum*,⁶⁰ demonstrates this fact.

The temple is the place of the Liturgy, separated and prepared for this end, where the limits between the interior and the exterior are established in a dramatic way.⁶¹ But the limits of the sacred space transcend the physical and open the spirit to a contemplation that knows no limits. In addition to the artistic merit or merely functional purpose, the architectural styles interpret the sacred space and transmit messages, transforming diverse ideologies and spirituality into forms and ornaments. Cathedrals and churches reveal a profound knowledge of the human spirit; the necessity of a sacred space as capable of leading to meditation and transcendence, capable of putting the individual face to face with the grandeur of the Divine.⁶² The sacred space should be capable of adequately interpreting the words, gestures and actions of the Liturgy in order for a corresponding union between meaning space and liturgical action.⁶³ “The very nature of a Christian church is defined by the Liturgy, which is an assembly of the faithful (*ecclesia*) who are the living stones of the Church (cf. *1 Pet 2:5*)”.⁶⁴

As the architectural structure should aid in transmitting a call to transcendence and an idea of community, it should incorporate a dynamism towards the heights, as is manifested in the construction of the gothic cathedrals.⁶⁵ Of all architectural forms, gothic is that which speaks most distinctly of the transcendental, with its ageless symbolism and beauty. The gothic church or cathedral can, with just reason, be called a microcosm of the Divinely ordered universe⁶⁶ as it is a synthesis of elements from the universe, transformed and elevated in a spectacular art form. Gothic forms are more than an expression

59) SWAAN, Wim. *The Gothic Cathedral*. New York: Park Lane, 1981. p. 55.

60) SARAIVA DOS SANTOS, F. R. *Dicionário Latino-Português*. 10a. ed. RJ: Garnier, 1993. 298 and 1187.

61) MARASCHIN, Jaci. *A Beleza da Santidade, Ensaios de Liturgia*. São Paulo: ASTE, 1996. p. 73-74.

62) TERRIN, Aldo Natale. *O rito: antropologia e fenomenologia da ritualidade*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2004. p. 212.

63) *Ibid.*, p. 218.

64) BENEDICT XVI. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Op. Cit., 41.

65) TERRIN, Op. Cit., p. 223-225.

66) SWANN, Op. Cit., p. 51.

of artistic talent; they tangibly reflect the aspirations and soul of a people, “religious fervour given expression in a soaring verticality, to the longing for ‘light of spiritual essence’, clarity, order and synthesis (...) a potent compound of Mysticism and Scholasticism”.⁶⁷ A clear manifestation of the *splendor veritatis*; radiance of Truth, the ascending lines of the gothic construction are the symbol of Christian thought, of the uplifting of souls toward heaven.⁶⁸ The structural dimensions of the gothic cathedral speak of invisible realities through a symbolic language that, in fact, could be conveyed to any place of worship. The gothic cathedral, as a figure of the Celestial Jerusalem, is an image of paradise; the lateral walls symbolize the Old and New Testament, the pillars and columns, the Prophets.⁶⁹

The gothic style evidently creates an atmosphere that nurtures contemplation and a mystical experience, simultaneously producing a peaceful equilibrium within the human temperament, a well-being and pleasure that alleviates the arduous difficulties encountered in daily life.⁷⁰ “In the play of light and shadow, in forms at times massive, at times delicate, structural considerations certainly come into play, but so too do the tensions peculiar to the experience of God, the mystery both ‘awesome’ and ‘alluring’”.⁷¹

2.3. Liturgical gestures

The significance of the ceremonial dimension of the Liturgy is emphasized in the consideration of man in his corporal and spiritual composition. It is clear that the soul is the substantial determining part; the more noble and important, that gives meaning and value to the external reality of the body. As Saint Thomas Aquinas⁷² affirms: “The soul (...) is the form of the body”. However, it is in the harmonious complement of the two factors that man reaches his complete expression.

67) Ibid., p. 56.

68) MARTIN, H. *L'Art Gothique*. Collection de Précis sur l'histoire de l'art. Paris: Flammarion, 1947. p. 6-7.

69) CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Símbolo da Jerusalém Celeste. In: Dr. Plinio. São Paulo. Ano 7, No. 80. (Nov., 2004); p. 32-34.

70) CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. Harmonia pensado por Deus. In: Dr. Plinio. São Paulo. Ano 10, No. 117 (Dec., 2007); p. 34.

71) JOHN PAUL II. Letter to Artists. Op. Cit., 8.

72) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* I, q.85, a. 1.

Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united (...) Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. The epicure Gassendi used to offer Descartes the humorous greeting: “O Soul!” And Descartes would reply: “O Flesh!” (...) Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature.⁷³

In light of this inherent, substantial union of body and soul, it is apparent that there is a reciprocal effect between them; not only are the sentiments and experiences of the soul reflected in the body, but the positions and attitudes of the body also affect the soul. “Human harmony results in the adequate adaptation of the unity of two dissimilar principles, the body and soul”.⁷⁴ If by natural law every movement of the soul is reflected in the body, the religious sentiment, which is certainly one of the most profound, has the necessity of manifesting itself externally. The religious history of all peoples offers a clear demonstration of this.⁷⁵ Gestures are symbolic because the body has the ability to condense, in signs, the human dimension in its relations with God.⁷⁶

Gestures within the Eucharistic celebration unite man, the world and God.⁷⁷ The expression of the whole human person, from an anthropological perspective, fully occurs only when gestures are accompanied by words and words by gestures.⁷⁸ It has been affirmed that seventy-five per cent of our inner sentiments are revealed through our posture and twenty-five per cent through our tone of voice.⁷⁹ The gestures of the Eucharistic celebration, accompanied by words or prayers, are thus of full significance; vocal and physical manifestations of an interior transcending connection with the Divine.

73) BENEDICT XVI. *Deus Caritas Est*, Op. Cit., 5.

74) DE BRUYNE, Edgar. *L'Esthétique du Moyen Âge*. Louvaine: L'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1947. 67.

75) RIGHETTI, Op. Cit. p. 4.

76) VERGOTE, A. *Gestos e Ações Simbólicas em Liturgia*. In: *Revista Concilium*. SP: Vozes, 1971. p. 171.

77) *Ibid.*, p. 68.

78) ALDAZÁBAL, José. *Vocabulario básico de liturgia*. Barcelona: Centro de Pastoral Litúrgica, 2002. p. 162

79) PASTRO, Op. Cit., p. 114.

During the liturgical sequence, the celebrants, and, at specific intervals, the entire community, partake in movements that are deeply symbolic. Standing, kneeling, sitting, bows, kiss of peace, processions, the sign of the cross, striking the chest, are all actions that connect the entire person with the celebration. The gestures performed within the Liturgy are gestures of Christ and as such they have their own particular beauty and aesthetic value.⁸⁰ Von Balthasar⁸¹ notes that the gestures of Christ reach all the faithful throughout the generations in the gestures of the Liturgy. In its nobility and beauty the gesture can be seen as the poetry of the act.⁸²

The most symbolic gestures during the liturgical celebration are those of the hands, which are the members of the body through which man principally develops his activity, denoting power and strength in religious language.⁸³ The hands extended during determined prayers of petition and mercy is a gesture from the primitive Church. When the celebrant and concelebrant extend their hands with palms downward, during the Eucharistic prayer, it is a sign of the invocation of the Holy Spirit and is, in its origin from the Old Testament — a petition of a victim for God.⁸⁴ Saint Thomas explains the significance of the specific actions of the celebrant, and the symbolism that unites these exterior acts with interior dispositions. “The priest in extending his arms signifies the outstretching of Christ’s arms upon the cross. He also lifts up his hands as he prays, to point out that his prayer is directed to God for the people (...) at times he joins his hands, and bows down; praying earnestly and humbly, [he] denotes the obedience and humility of Christ”.⁸⁵

Another significant gesture of the Eucharistic celebration is the procession. The celebrant, deacons, acolytes, and cross-bearer begin the celebration with a cortege of rhythmic, spaced paces through the congregation in the direction of the presbytery, symbolizing the cortege of the church on earth toward the celestial Jerusalem.⁸⁶ In its choreographic dimension of noble bodily movements accompanied by music, it stimulates the elevation of the faithful in

80) MARINI, Op. Cit.

81) VON BALTHASAR, Op. Cit., p. 372.

82) GALLARD, J. A Beleza do Gesto: uma estética das condutas. SP: Universidade de São Paulo, 1997. p. 27.

83) RIGHETTI, Op. Cit., p. 124.

84) ELLIOT, Op. Cit., p. 72.

85) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, III, Op. Cit. q. 83 a.5.

86) GARRIDO BONAÑO, Manuel. Curso de Liturgia Romano. Madrid:BAC, 1961. p. 17.

preparation for the celebration, drawing them interiorly toward the altar. In this respect, Clément⁸⁷ emphasizes that the processional act is in itself more expressive than words. The procession is repeated in other parts of the celebration such as the offertory, and during the recessional at the end of Mass, enriched by the accompanying instrumental or choral music that give life and beauty to its sequence.

The movements of the celebrants, initiated in the entrance cortege, continue throughout the celebration, for example, in the rhythmic circular movements around the altar, as in the incensing. Thus the Eucharistic celebration includes a choreographic dimension, in the succession of external actions — at times performed together with certain prayers or music, and at other times executed during periods of significant silence — in a continuous harmonic demonstration of interior disposition.

2.4. Cosmic elements

Fire and Light: The imagery within the Liturgy is not only expressed through art and gestures, but is also enriched with elements of the cosmos and human existence. The use of light and fire is markedly present in the liturgical ceremonies of the Easter Vigil, in which the Paschal Candle represents Christ Resurrected, the Light of the World, the Sun that never sets. It is lit by a new fire, representing the *Lumen Christi*, and all of the other candles share its flame. The *Præconium paschali* or *Exultet* proclaims the symbolism of this Candle, in its cosmic and spiritual dimension: Accept this Easter candle, a flame divided but undimmed, a pillar of fire that glows to the honour of God. For it is fed by the melting wax, which the mother bee brought forth to make this precious candle. Let it mingle with the lights of heaven and continue bravely burning to dispel the darkness of this night!

Fire, recognized as one of the four elements of the universe, is noteworthy in the Liturgy for its immaterial or spiritual nature, symbolic of love or interior fervour. Fire is also considered to have a double origin; a positive celestial origin expressed by the fact that the flame is always directed to the heights, and a subterranean or infernal origin as an instrument of death and chastisement.⁸⁸ It is an element that consumes and cleanses. In the Old Testament,

87) CLÉMENT, François. *Liturgical Rites of Meal and Sacrifice*. In: *Altar and Sacrifice*. London. (1997); p. 91.

88) SARTORE, Domenico y TRIACCA, A.M. *Dicionário da Liturgia*. São Paulo: Paulistas, 1992. p. 338.

the multiple Divine manifestations took place under the form of fire, as in the burning bush to Moses. It was also relevant in the prophetic vocations — as when Elias was carried away in a chariot of fire. In the New Testament, tongues of fire descended on the Apostles, symbolizing the transforming action of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the human religious experience, fire has been a symbolic presence, always with Divine connotations more than a merely functional value.

In the ceremonial procession toward the altar, candles are carried beside the cross as a guard of honour, and remain alight upon the altar during the entire course of the celebration. They are symbolically carried by the acolytes to accompany the celebrant or deacon in the recitation of the Gospel. The figurative representation of the candlestick is described by Saint Thomas.

The candlestick was set up to enhance the beauty of the temple, for the magnificence of a house depends on it being well lighted. Now the candlestick had seven branches, as Josephus observes (Antiquit. iii. 7,8) to signify the seven planets, wherewith the whole world is illuminated (...) Christ was signified by the candlestick, for He said Himself (Jo. viii. 12): I am the light of the world; while the seven lamps denoted the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.⁸⁹

Illumination during the Liturgy, apart from its religious significance, has always been considered to be an aesthetic element in the Eucharistic celebration, for its aspect of beauty and artistic expression. Pavel Florensky speaks of the beauty achieved in the illumination of gold “by the tremulous light of a lamp or candle it springs to life and glitters in sparks beyond counting...evoking the sense of other lights, not of this earth, which fill the space of heaven”.⁹⁰ Besides the primitive function of illuminating the darkness, candles and lamps also have a joyful and celebrative significance. On the occasion of the night sinaxis presided over by Saint Paul in Tróade, *erant lampadae copiosae in coenaculo*. During this epoch of the victory of the Church over paganism, the Liturgy did not find a more august scenario than the multiform and dazzling illumination of the basilicas.⁹¹

89) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica I - II, q. 102 a. 4.

90) JOHN PAUL II, Op. Cit., 8.

91) RIGHETTI, Op. Cit., p. 134-135.

Dionysius the Areopagite⁹² introduced the hypothesis that the contemplation of light emanating from material objects could aid in the comprehension of Divine Light, while Saint Thomas⁹³ speaks of “brightness and clarity” as one of the three conditions for beauty. The importance of the light of the sun in the liturgical setting reaches its full expression in the gothic style, where the structure is designed to maximize the entrance of light emanating from the sun.

The sun is symbolic of wisdom and justice,⁹⁴ for it illuminates all things, revealing all that exists and all that is done. It is the sun that marks the hour of the day, and in its absence human activity is diminished or ceases completely. The image of the sun maintains an aristocratic characteristic, and in Christian tradition is symbolic of the presence of the Creator. The sun, as the measurement of time (day/night) and space (directionality) is a primal figure of the Divine act of creation and redemption.⁹⁵ The rays of the sun penetrating the stained glass, while illuminating the figures portrayed in the glass and projecting a coloured luminosity within the structure, also hold a profound symbolism from medieval ideology. In passing through glass without breaking it, the light represented the Word of God, Light of the Father that had passed through the body of the Virgin, thus becoming a symbol of the virgin birth. The resplendent stained glass windows also represent the Doctors of the Church, enlightening all with their wisdom.⁹⁶ The clear light radiating from within the structure of the church illuminates the architectural and artistic elements, making visible their own colour. “Is there anything more beautiful than light, which, although having no colour in itself, makes the colours of all illuminated objects appear”.⁹⁷ In an ethereal combination, the coloured lights shining from the stained glass at times illuminate the clouds of incense arising from the censor with poetic and transcendental expression. “Consider, then, the precious metals, marble and stones; where does their beauty come from, if not their luminosity? As their etymology indicates, bronze (aes, aer-is), gold (aur-um), and silver (ar-gentum) are

92) SWAAN, Op. Cit., p. 48.

93) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 39 a.8.

94) PIAZZA, Waldomiro Octavio. *Introdução à Fenomenologia Religiosa*. Petropolis: Vozes, 1976. p. 98.

95) CHIFFLEY, Ephraem, O.P. *The Altar: Place of Sacrifice and Sacred Space in the Religious Building*. In: *Altar and Sacrifice*. London. (1997); p. 28.

96) CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, *Símbolo da Jerusalém Celeste*, Op. Cit., p. 32-34.

97) HUGO DE SAN VICTOR, *Eruditio didascalica* XII. Apud DE BRUYNE, Op. Cit., 259.

beautiful because of the air, illuminated by the sun”.⁹⁸ Dionysius explains the imagery of this illumination.

But, what would any one say of the very ray of the sun? For the light is from the Good, and an image of the Goodness, wherefore also the Good is celebrated under the name of Light; as in a portrait the original is manifested...the brilliant likeness of the Divine Goodness, this our great sun, wholly bright and ever luminous, as a most distant echo of the Good, both enlightens whatever is capable of participating in it, and possesses the light in the highest degree of purity, unfolding to the visible universe, above and beneath, the splendours of its own rays.⁹⁹

Water: Water, another element of the universe, is intrinsically symbolic both in the cosmic and spiritual spheres, as a source of production and of life.¹⁰⁰ The human experience has consistently seen water as a powerful element that sustains or destroys. In its religious connotation, it is mostly considered for its cleansing and regenerating properties, as in its use in baptism, as a sensible sign of the cleansing from original sin. It has transcendental symbolism not only in human life but also as an expression of Christian salvation.¹⁰¹ The dividing of the waters of the Red Sea, the water spurting from the rock at Meriba, the rains that came at the bidding of Elias, all scenes from the Old Testament, are complemented by the New, in which Christ sanctified the waters of the universe through His baptism in the Jordan, and preached of a water that quenches the supernatural thirst of man.

In the Eucharistic celebration, water is used for the cleansing of the celebrants' hands prior to the consecration, as a symbol of interior purification before the apex of the celebration. Although images of the Old Testament evoke cleansings of the entire body, only the hands are now symbolically cleansed, for they, according to Saint Cyril, are the synthesis of the entire person.¹⁰² Saint Thomas¹⁰³ agrees: “the washing of the hands is observed; for this can be done more readily, and suffices for denoting perfect cleansing. For, since the hand is the organ of organs (De Anima iii), all works are attribut-

98) DE BRUYNE, L'Esthétique du Moyen Âge. Op. Cit., p. 71. (Personal translation)

99) DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE. On Divine Names. Caput IV Section IV. [On line]. <Available in: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/dio/index.htm>> [Consulted: 21 Apr., 2009]

100) PIAZZA, Op. Cit., p. 104.

101) ALDAZÁBAL, Op. Cit., p. 126.

102) Ibid., p. 137.

103) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica III, q. 83 a.5.

ed to the hands: hence it is said in Ps. Xxv.6: I will wash my hands among the innocent.” A small amount of water is mixed into the wine before the consecration, representing the human part of the sacrifice. The water mixed with the wine also represents the blood and the water that streamed from the side of Christ, and the union of Christ and the Church.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the most profoundly metaphorical presence of water for the congregation is in the *Asperges*, which occasionally even today is performed before the Eucharistic celebration. During the intonation of Psalm 51 to a Gregorian melody, the celebrant walks throughout the church, sprinkling holy water like a purifying rain upon the congregation. “*Aperges me hyssopo, et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor*” (Ps. 51:7). It is a reminder of baptismal innocence, and the power of the Divine purifying action of holy water.

Incense: Incense is replete with artistic and supernatural expression, uniting the past and present. It is associated with sacrificial offerings in the Old Testament, as is demonstrated in the book of Exodus when God himself enlightens Moses as to its essence and purpose (Ex. 30, 34-56). With its symbolic expression, it is used today most especially during solemn Eucharistic celebrations; in the entrance procession, at the beginning of the celebration, at the proclamation of the Gospel and in the offertory, where it symbolizes prayer and initiates, through the senses of sight and smell, the great act which is about to occur.¹⁰⁵ At the Elevation of the Host and chalice after the consecration, in the perfumed smoke of the incense that rises to heaven, the Church sees with the psalmist a symbol of prayer *Dirigatur, Domine, oratio mea sicut incensum in conspectu tuo*. It is, in liturgical use, a symbol of prayer and sign of honour toward the sacred things and people.¹⁰⁶

The sense of smell particularly receives the impression of this aromatic substance. Saint Thomas¹⁰⁷ demonstrates the aesthetic and symbolic purpose of the use of incense. First, its significance of reverence for the sacrament so that by its good odour, it removes any unpleasant smell; secondly, it illustrates the effect of grace, wherein Christ was filled as with a good odour, “Behold, the odour of my son is like a ripe field”.

As the incense infuses the entire sanctuary with subtle odours, it calls to mind the anointing of Saint Mary Magdalene, when upon shedding balsam

104) GARRIDO BONAÑO, Op. Cit., p. 326-327.

105) CLÉMENT, Op. Cit., p. 91.

106) RIGHETTI, Op. Cit., p. 32-33.

107) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica III, q. 83 a. 5.

upon the feet of Christ, the entire house was permeated with its fragrance. It also affects the sense of sight with its lucid movements and transparent appearance. It appears to be of both a physical and spiritual nature and as such speaks of the transcendental, well representing the spiritual aspect of human nature in prayer and contemplation, in its silent ascent toward the heights — *Sursum Corda!* - the clouds of incense enveloping the altar create a setting of sacredness and beauty, calling attention to the great sacrifice of Calvary that is to occur. The perennial transcendental quality of incense is revealed in the significance of the two altars in the Old Testament. The Fathers of the Church found a symbolic interpretation in the works of Philo, who indicates the altar of the holocaust as representing the world of the senses, because it is visible and tangible, and the altar of incense, hidden in the inner part of the temple as representing transcendental ideas.¹⁰⁸ The use of incense, then, denotes an elevating of the senses above the earthly and carnal toward the invisible, eternal, supernatural sphere.

2.5. *Silence and sound*

Silence: If the Liturgy is resplendent with corporal movements, art, music and words, it is the periods of eloquent silence and stillness during the celebrations that give full meaning and expression to them. Silence can be considered as one of the wisest attitudes of the human being, for it leads to contemplation, meditation and reflection.¹⁰⁹ It is in a meditative silence and stillness that one sees and admires, makes decisions and resolutions, and prepares to act fruitfully, for silence allows ideas and inspirations to germinate within the interior. Silence has always been deemed as conducive to an attitude of mystery and reverence before the Divine.¹¹⁰ “According to Saint Gregory the Great, silence is the ‘house of the mystic’, and for the mystic, God is the ‘Lord of Silence’”.¹¹¹ Silence is a way to begin the interior journey toward the ineffable, arousing the capacity to see, hear, smell and touch, that which is beyond our physical senses. It is a form of relationship with everything.¹¹² For

108) PHILO JUDAEUS. Opera Omnia. Cited by: BETRAM, Jerome. The Meaning of the Altar in the Sacred Liturgy. In: Altar and Sacrifice. London. (1997); p. 74.

109) PASTRO, Op. Cit., p. 117.

110) PIAZZA, Op. Cit., p. 113.

111) URIBE y OSORIO, Op. Cit., p. 117. (Personal translation)

112) Ibid., p. 117.

the mystic, Elizabeth of the Trinity, silence constitutes a fundamental requisite of the soul to be elevated to divine union.¹¹³

A period of silence marks a moment of grandeur and significance, as demonstrated in the narration of the celestial Liturgy of the Apocalypse, “When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half hour” (Ap. 8:1). The silence within the Eucharistic Celebration is clearly not merely a mute moment between parts of the celebration. It is, rather, conatural with prayer, a time for contemplation, openness to the supernatural. Mattheeuws¹¹⁴ illustrates the transcendent and aesthetic role of liturgical silence.

Only silence can reveal the absent God in His transcendence (...) Silence in liturgy is always a shared silence. It is a communal silence, and thus creates a bond, it creates community and solidarity. Silence is a bridge that brings us together. Finally, silence in liturgy also has an important aesthetic value (...) A liturgy of only words, where you have no breathing space, is not artistically justifiable. Good liturgy keeps a good balance between moments of word and silence, between action and contemplation.

Clearly, this liturgical silence it is not just an exterior silence, in which one merely stops speaking, rather, it should correspond to an interior silence¹¹⁵ in which the spirit is entirely concentrated on the significance of the act being performed. In reality, this silence can be seen as a high form of participation in the Liturgy. Maritain¹¹⁶ mentions that the term “active participation” within the Liturgy, often receives limited interpretation as simply exterior, manifested participation. He decisively points out that from the philosophical perspective, to listen with the ears or the heart, can be just as “active” as speaking.

The nature of the diverse intervals of silence depends on the moments of the Liturgy in which they are observed, facilitating the faithful in concentration and recollection, meditation and respect. The silence of recollection, for personal prayer, silence of assimilation, overall during the presiding prayer, silence of meditation, after the readings and homily, and a silence of ador-

113) PHILIPON, M. *Doctrine Spirituelle de Soeur Élisabeth de la Trinité*. Montréal: Granger Frères, 1937, p.69.

114) MATTHEEUWS, Gino. The ‘Ars Celebrandi’ of the Liturgical Congregation: Some forgotten Dimensions. In: *Questions Liturgiques*. Leuven: Liturgisch Instituut, Vol.83, 2002 2-3 p. 134.

115) CASEL, Odo. *Liturgia come mistero*. s.l.: Medusa, 2002. p. 140.

116) MARITAIN, Jaques; MARITAIN Raïssa. *Liturgia e Contemplação*. São Paulo: Flamboyant, 1962. p.108.

ation, at communion.¹¹⁷ Without these periods of silence, the sequence of liturgical acts can turn into a succession of exterior movement, words and gestures, devoid of their mystical and transcendental dimension. In this contemplative silence, communication with the Divine is achieved, for silence and the plenitude of union with God, together form one dimension.¹¹⁸

The alternating action and silence of the Liturgy is also a symbol of human life, in which action is complemented by contemplation. Liturgical silence supports and strengthens the more active parts of the celebration by deepening their significance. In the aspiration of a reconciliation between the visible and the invisible realities, the words, gestures and rituals must stem from an “intensely experienced silence” in order to be fully effective.¹¹⁹

The Word: The symbolic actions and movements within the Liturgy are in themselves a language that speaks to the interior, but the words pronounced aids in explaining their deep symbolism. Saint Augustine¹²⁰ observes the supremacy of the word as an expression of inward thought. “For among men words have obtained far and away the chief place as a means of indicating the thoughts of the mind...the countless multitude of signs through which men express their thoughts consist of words”. Language intrinsically expresses the transcendental that exists naturally in the interior of each one. Words have a symbolic role, creating a relation between what is visible and what is invisible.¹²¹ Since language is an expression of thought and transcendence is a fundamental dimension of the human structure, language, in expressing thought and experience, also expresses transcendence.¹²²

The sequence of the celebration unfolds in a dynamic dialogue — a dialogue that both inspires and expresses profound interior sentiments. This dialogue solidifies the communal structure of the celebration, with a union of voices expressing the same desires and sentiments. The liturgical word serves to express a determined attitude in preparation for a solemn moment as in the *Sursum corda! Habemus ad Dominum!* Daniélou¹²³ emphasizes the writings

117) SARTORE y TRIACCA, Op. Cit., p. 1139.

118) Ibid., p. 142.

119) JONGERIUS, Henk. O.P. I'd rather keep Silence. In: Questions Liturgiques. Leuven. Vol. 73 (1992); p. 87.

120) SAINT AUGUSTINE, On Christian Doctrine 3, Op. Cit., p. 637.

121) JONGERIUS, Op. Cit., p. 84.

122) NASSER CARRERA, Maria Celina de Q. O que dizem os símbolos? São Paulo: Paulus, 2003. p. 21.

123) DANIELLOU, Jean. Bible et Liturgie. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1951. p. 183.

of Cyril of Jerusalem with respect to the holy fear and awe that these words awaken, as the faithful are encouraged to leave earthly cares aside to elevate the heart and soul in preparation for the manifestation of the Divine presence. Before this apex of the celebration is reached, the faithful affirm in unison that they have lifted their hearts above the terrestrial toward the Divine — *Habemus ad Dominum*. “The words we use in liturgy will be, almost per definition, praying words. They enlarge the space in which we stand and remind us of the relationship in which we are ‘involved’; they make us feel the ground in which we are rooted and open the doors of our hearts to the energy of life, the stream of breathe which recreates us”.¹²⁴

The biblical readings proffered during the Liturgy of the Word have always been a source not only of profound philosophical and sacred reflection, but also an artistic literary experience. Among all the arts, that which contains the value of the word — rhetoric and poetry — are of particular importance in the Liturgy.¹²⁵ De Bruyne¹²⁶ emphasizes how biblical readings provoke a synthesis of human sentiments giving diverse impressions; profundity and clarity, extreme simplicity, richness, simple pleasures and that of sacred fear. “What human work is capable of arousing such emotions?” The Biblical passages highlight figures such as Judith, Esther or Elias, replete with symbolism and imagery. The descriptions of the elect people in the struggles of their journey to the Promised Land arouse emotion and are of plentiful literary merit. The bible contains a profusion of literary genre, at times scientific and rational, at others, pertaining to emotion and passion, bringing to mind the past, interpreting the present, and predicting the future.¹²⁷ The psalms, intoned by the cantor between the readings, contain expressions of the deepest human sentiments, as well as rich descriptive language of nature and life, which most clearly illustrate the divine-human character of Sacred Scripture.¹²⁸ According to Hegel,¹²⁹ the Psalms offer classic examples of authentic magnificence, put before all time as a model in that which mankind has before him in his religious representation of God, brilliantly expressed in a most rigorous elevation

124) JONGERIUS, Op. Cit., p. 85.

125) VAGAGGINI, Op. Cit., p. 57.

126) DE BRUYNE. *L'Esthétique du Moyen Âge*. Op. Cit., p. 258.

127) *Ibid.*, p. 257-258.

128) THE WORD OF GOD in the Life and Mission of the Church [On line]. <Available in: <http://www.vatican.va>> [Consulted: 21 Apr., 2009]

129) HEGEL, Op. Cit.. p. 331.

of soul. Clearly, one attains his original identity and dignity in listening to the Word of God.¹³⁰

Music: Beauty is mostly linked to sight, but there does exist beauty in hearing. With regard to music, Plotinus states, “melodies and cadences are beautiful”.¹³¹ Both Plato and Aristotle considered music to be the best way to inspire love of order and beauty.¹³² Music, and specifically singing, uniquely expresses interior sentiments, desires and ideas, constituting a more universal expression than the simple word, for it is a language that all cultures and epochs share. Words assume a more lasting and extensive significance when encompassed in melodies, for music has the ability to reach the depths of the emotive faculties.¹³³ Music, then, is not only an outlet to express what one holds in the interior, but also a means to consolidate ideas and serve as a stimulus for contemplation.

Music holds a singular place within the Eucharistic celebration. Among the varied forms of artistic expression, it is that which is linked most intimately with the nature of liturgical worship, in its expressive dimension of community worship.¹³⁴ Liturgical music speaks a language of its own; it is the most attractive form of prayer that reflects the hierarchical and community nature of the celebration. Through music, the entire celebration anticipates the celestial Liturgy of the holy city of Jerusalem.¹³⁵ Dionysius¹³⁶ expresses how the sacred chants serenely prepare the spirit to penetrate the mysteries celebrated, putting one in harmony not only with the Divine realities, as also with oneself and the others.

The art of music, as an integral component of the Liturgy, is given greater value than any other art form in the tradition of the Church. Sacred music was present in the Old Testament, and it continues to evolve throughout the

130) GÓMEZ RODRIGUEZ, José Miguel. Bulletin XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 5-26 October 2008 *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. [On line]. <Available in: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/synod12fourth.htm>> [Consulted: Apr. 21, 2009]

131) PLOTINUS. First Ennead VI. 2.

132) GAL, Roger. *Histoire de l'Éducation*. Colección “Que sais-je? Paris: Universitaires de France, 1953. p. 34.

133) LÓPEZ MARTÍN, Julián. *A Liturgia da Igreja*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2006. p. 184.

134) VAGAGGINI, Op. Cit., p. 57.

135) MUSICAM SACRAM. *Instruction on Music in the Liturgy*, 1,5. [On line]. <Available in: <http://www.vatican.va>> [Consulted: 19 Mar., 2009]

136) DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Caput. III , Section V.

centuries. “In the *ars celebrandi*, liturgical song has a pre-eminent place. Saint Augustine rightly says in a famous sermon that ‘the new man sings a new song’. Singing is an expression of joy (...) an expression of love”.¹³⁷ The Bishop of Hippo¹³⁸ recalled the emotions he experienced through the sacred chants of the church during the time of his conversion that moved him to the point of tears. Saint Thomas,¹³⁹ speaks of the spiritual joy that the intoning of the Alleluia and the singing of the offertory denotes. The singing of various parts of the ritual is necessary for the inclusive expression of the entire community, as it transmits internal sentiments, enriching the communication among the faithful, as all unite their voices in a single hymn of praise. In a particular way, the movements of the procession are enriched and brought to life by accompanying music.¹⁴⁰

The joy of the sacred atmosphere is reflected in diverse genre of sacred music. In a particular way, Gregorian chant represents the archetype of liturgical chant, with its transcendental aspect. “The ‘beautiful’ was thus wedded to the ‘true’, so that through art too souls might be lifted up from the world of the senses to the eternal”.¹⁴¹ This chant, in its simplicity that seems to spring more from the heart than the lips, awakens the spirit to calm reflection and contemplation so necessary in today’s world. Although Gregorian chant, with its spiritual and cultural patrimony, transmits a most pure and limpid form of sacred music, and has been recognized as the chant proper to the Roman Liturgy, there are other integral forms. Polyphony, and popular forms of sacred music have developed to successfully enrich the celebration. Varied musical instruments, particularly the organ, are conducive to artistic enrichment of the celebration, and as such it can be considered as the apex of human expression.¹⁴²

3. *Mystical structure of the liturgy*

The apex of the Eucharistic Celebration unfolds within a vibrant context of signs and symbols that aid the faithful in preparing for mystical union. ”When

137) BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Op. Cit., 42.

138) SAINT AUGUSTINE. *The Confessions*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing, 1997. p. 307.

139) SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica* III,q. 83 a. 4.

140) ELLIOT, Op. Cit. p. 23.

141) JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists*. Op. Cit., 7.

142) DE BRUYNE, Edgar. *Historia de la estética*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1963. p. 731.

minds are enlightened and hearts are enkindled, signs begin to “speak”.¹⁴³ The dimension of *pulchrum* and symbolism in the Liturgy, considered in the first part of this work, is clearly not limited to merely sensorial pleasure, but rather to the elevation of the spiritual faculties. Signs and symbols facilitate the rising above concrete realities, opening man’s spirit to the transcendental. The phenomena revealed throughout the Eucharistic celebration — the sounds, silence, colours, movements and ambience created by sacred art and architecture — are fundamental external elements in this uplifting of the congregation. Symbolism is, in reality, a process that brings one to pass from the visible to the invisible. According to Hugh of St. Victor,¹⁴⁴ the mystical life begins through the delightful contemplation of the symbolic forms of this world.

The mystical vocation is universal and a true dimension of the human being.¹⁴⁵ Von Balthasar¹⁴⁶ demonstrates that the mystical experience in its most recent interpretation is considered to be the specific manifestation of a general and, so to say, “normal” experience of the Christian who attempts to seriously live his faith.

The Eucharistic Celebration is, in the full sense of the word, a mystical experience. It is not a distant, inaccessible experience relegated to a privileged few; rather it is essentially universal and timeless. The very structure of the Liturgy, in its progressive stages towards union, is by nature, mystical. The determined steps constitute an organic preparation, without precipitation, toward the fulfilment of the mystery.¹⁴⁷

The entire Eucharistic Celebration unfolds as a reflective mystical dialogue in which God draws the soul to Himself. The various parts of the celebration can be compared to the mystical way of the soul on its path toward the climax of mystical union. In this association, the Penitential Rite represents the purgative stage of the soul, the Liturgy of the Word, the illuminative stage, while the stage of union is achieved at the end of the celebration, in the reception of communion.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the faithful are purified in the recognition and absolution of their faults, illuminated through the Word of God, and reach the height

143) JOHN PAUL II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 14.

144) Apud DE BRUYNE, Edgar. *Estudios de estética medieval. Época románica*. Madrid: Gredos, 1959. p. 224.

145) URIBE CARVAJAL, H. y OSORIO, B. *Cultura y espiritualidad*. Medellín: UPB, 2008. p.120-123.

146) VON BALTHASAR, Op. Cit., p. 267.

147) VON HILDEBRAND, Op. Cit., p. 102.

148) ARBOLEDA MORA, Carlos. *Experiencia, filosofía y testimonio*. Medellín: UPB, 2008. p. 124.

of mystical union in communion. Distinct and yet profoundly related with one another, the various stages are perfectly harmonized during the Eucharistic Celebration and constitute a truly mystical experience for the congregation.

3.1. Penitential act — *Kyrie eleison!*

In the beginning of the spiritual life, the soul is in need of a purifying action in which it is freed from its defects and deficiencies in order to progress toward perfect union with God. According to Saint John of the Cross,¹⁴⁹ during this stage, the soul is penetrated as it were by a flame — the Holy Spirit — which destroys and consumes the imperfections of the soul “wherein He prepares it for Divine union.” He illustrates the idea with the example of a flame that consumes a log of wood, first by stripping it of its exterior parts until the heat consumes it to such a point that the fire and the wood become one. This image demonstrates how the soul must be stripped of its defects and exterior distractions, to allow the process of mystical union to occur. Saint Augustine¹⁵⁰ compares the stage of purification as a kind journey to one’s native land. Likewise, at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, the faithful are beginning their mystical journey toward perfect union with the Divine Presence in the Eucharist. They have, already, physically entered the sacred space, leaving aside their everyday lives, with all its distractions and cares. The penitential act, found in the introductory rite of the Mass, allow the faithful to unite their spirit with this physical reality.

This act is not merely an interior individual act, but is accompanied by communal acts and words. The faithful call to mind their faults and ask for forgiveness. The symbolic acclamation of the Greek *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison*, with its Trinitarian symbolism, is a public manifestation of the need for mercy. Saint John of the Cross¹⁵¹ affirms that souls who fall into imperfections and suffer weakness with humility and meekness, in the loving fear of God, fully confide in Him. Therefore, this stage is a moment of confiding love, in preparation of the more complete manifestation of *agape*.

The penitential act, with its purifying action, serves as a preparation for the phase that immediately follows, the Liturgy of the Word. The faithful, once purified, hear the Word of God and are able to more fully benefit from the

149) SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS. *Living Flame of Love*. New York: Image Books, 1962. p.164-165.

150) SAINT AUGUSTINE, *On Christian Doctrine*, Op. Cit., p. 627.

151) SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, *Dark Night of the Soul*. L.I, c.II, 8.

readings. "...those that have not a healthy palate, and desire other things, cannot relish the spirit and life that these words contain, but rather find insipidity in them".¹⁵² In order for these Divine words, which are "spirit and life" to penetrate with all their illuminative force, the faithful must be purified and receptive to the Divine Revelation. In the mystical way of the spiritual life, three conditions are necessary in order to enter into the illuminative stage: a certain purity of heart, the mortification of the passions and profound convictions.¹⁵³ Likewise, in order to progress to the illuminating action of the proclamation of the Word of God in the Liturgy, the soul must be free from a heavy conscience and worldly distractions.

3.2. *Liturgy of the word*

Emerging from its state of purgation, the soul enters the illuminative stage of the mystical life, in which it is enlightened with gifts and favours that prepare it for mystical union. No longer detained by its former difficulties, the soul attains a certain constancy in contemplation and prayer, and a receptiveness to Divine lights and inspirations. In the liturgical dimension, the Liturgy of the Word constitutes the illuminative stage, for the faithful listen to the Divine word in a preparatory spirit. "During liturgical celebrations, *the proclamation of the Word in the Scriptures is a deeply dynamic dialogue*, a dialogue which reaches its highest degree of dynamism in the Eucharistic assembly."¹⁵⁴

The illuminative stage is characterized by a new enchantment with the Gospel, a desire to savour and meditate upon every word.¹⁵⁵ The Liturgy of the Word is the solemn proclamation of the relationship between God and man throughout the centuries, culminating in the reading of the Gospel. These readings are not just a remembrance of past happenings or doctrines; rather they are of timeless inspiration, and a source of insight and enlightenment each time their authentic message is read. The dynamism of the proclamation of the Word of God within the celebration is evident in its richness and sim-

152) SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, Op. Cit., p. 155.

153) TANQUERY, A.D. Comp. Teologia ascetica e mistica. 6. ed. Porto: Apostolado da Imprensa, 1961. p.458.

154) THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH. Op. Cit., 34.

155) TANQUEREY, Op. Cit., p. 459.

plicity. “The Word of God is like a hymn with many voices, proclaimed by God in a variety of ways and forms (cf. *Heb 1:1*)”.¹⁵⁶

This is the language used by God when He speaks to souls that are purified and clean: words wholly enkindled, even as David said: ‘Thy word vehemently enkindles.’ And the Prophet asked: ‘Are not my words as a fire?’ These words, as God Himself says, through Saint John, are spirit and life, and are felt to be such by souls that have ears to hear them, who, as I say, are souls that are pure and enkindled with love.¹⁵⁷

Significantly, an intimate bond exists between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist; the unity of the table of the Word and the table of the Bread. They are so closely linked that together they form but one act of worship. *Corpus Christi intelligitur etiam Scriptura Dei*. The Divine Scriptures are also considered the Body of Christ. *Ego Corpus Iesu Evangelium puto*. The Liturgy of the Word announces the message of life contained in the Sacred Scripture, while the Eucharist is the life-giving renewal of the sacrifice of Christ.¹⁵⁸ It could be said that there is an arch connecting the ambo with the Altar, in one continuous act of worship.

3.3. *Mystical union*

The moment of receiving Communion constitutes the apex of mystical union within the Eucharistic celebration, for having passed through the stages of purification and illumination, the soul is mature for a habitual and intimate union with God.¹⁵⁹ This union with God, a union of reciprocal penetration, is distinctive of mysticism¹⁶⁰ but in the Eucharist, this mystical union takes place in a more profound and accessible way than any other. “The sacramental “mysticism”, grounded in God’s condescension towards us (...) lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish”.¹⁶¹ This Eucharistic union constitutes the greatest manifestation of *agape*, in which God Himself enters as spiritual nourishment.

156) THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH. Op. Cit., 9.

157) SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, Op. Cit. p. 155.

158) GARRIDO BONAÑO, Op. Cit., p. 310.

159) TANQUERY, Op. Cit., p. 611.

160) URIBE y OSORIO, Op. Cit. p. 121.

161) BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*. Op.Cit., n. 13.

Stein reflects on the union that takes place between God and the soul, stating that it is one that can only occur between two spiritual persons. Since God is love, in His very being, the participated being of the soul also implies a participation in love. The union between the two, then, is a union of love.¹⁶²

However, since man is not purely spiritual, but also physical, the sacrifice is expressed through tangible signs, as in a meal. The fact of its being a banquet is part of the very structure of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Eucharist was instituted during a supper — the Last Supper — in which Christ pronounced the words, “Take, eat...Then he took a cup and...gave it to them, saying: Drink from it, all of you” . The highest point of any social gathering or festivity is always a meal. It is within a meal that the human instinct of sociability is entirely fulfilled. During a meal, the human being satisfies his need and desire for nourishment. But at the same time, he consolidates ideas, solidifies relationships and — through the art of conversation — expands his knowledge and culture. A meal constitutes, then, the basis of our social relationship, and the apex of any celebration. This institution within the human experience is a pale representation of the celestial banquet of the Eucharist, the *agape par excellence*. “We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: in it, God’s own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue His work in us and through us”.¹⁶³ The mystical vocation that encompasses each one reaches its climax in this *agape*.

This relationship of profound and mutual “abiding” *enables us to have a certain foretaste of heaven on earth*. Is this not the greatest of human yearnings? (...) God has placed in human hearts a “hunger” for his word (cf. *Am* 8:11), a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him. Eucharistic communion was given so that we might be “sated” with God here on earth, in expectation of our complete fulfilment in heaven.¹⁶⁴

In this realization of the mystical act of the liturgical celebration, there is no contradiction with the phenomenology of mystical donation. Every human can have an experience of the Absolute in opening himself ontologically to the mystery. In this dimension, philosophy opens the way to a full manifestation of the Absolute, and theology serves to indicate the realization and actualization of this path. The mystical facet of the human experience is one

162) STEIN. Op. Cit., p. 520.

163) BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*. Op. Cit., 14.

164) JOHN PAUL II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Op. Cit., 19.

that interests both theology and philosophy. Perhaps in a closer relationship between these two fields — each one offering its own perspective — a deeper appreciation of mysticism can be gained. This possibility is an opportunity for further investigation.

Conclusion

The Liturgy, through its beauty, symbolism and mystical composition, is of fundamental significance within the human experience, satiating the longing for the truth and good, which exists in every human being. It fulfils the timeless needs of humanity in a society that has, to some extent, lost its stability and sense of purpose due to rapid technological advances and globalization. Von Balthasar emphasizes that “Beauty is the disinterested one, without which the ancient world refused to comprehend itself, a word which both unnoticeably and yet unmistakably has said good bye to our new world, a world of interests, leaving it to its own avarice and sadness”.¹⁶⁵

As a result of the pragmatic visualization that encompasses all facets of society, the innate human yearning for the Absolute and the transcendent, has often been ignored or entirely forgotten. However, society has not ceased to demonstrate a desire for communion with the sacred. Sociologists have observed that when transcendent symbols are diluted or eliminated, other elements must take their place.¹⁶⁶ The consequences of the emphasis on the purely practical have been manifold and detrimental. The abuse of drugs, violence and despair is intrinsically linked to this lack of care for beauty, transcendence and ceremony. The Liturgy, so diversely enriched, can be a means of restoring these aspects within human existence, filling the emptiness and helplessness that increasingly inhabit modern man.

It is of interest that society has recently demonstrated an increased appreciation for contemplation and beauty, as though searching for an escape from the oppression of daily life. There has been a resurgence of appreciation for Gregorian chant. Thousands flock to visit the great basilicas and cathedrals of the world each year in order to experience beauty and transcendence through sacred art and architecture. In this same vein, an appreciation of the diverse aspects of the Liturgy — symbolism, art, ceremony, mystical dimension —

165) VON BALTHASAR, *Op. Cit.*, p. 22. (Personal translation)

166) CHIFFLEY, Ephraem, O.P. *The Altar: Place of Sacrifice and Sacred Space in the Religious building.* In: *Altar and Sacrifice.* London. (1997); p. 30.

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is of prime importance in consolidating these aspirations of the human spirit. Some dimensions of the liturgical ceremony, are at times sadly neglected for their supposed lack of practicality and usefulness. This investigation has highlighted these dimensions in particular for their symbolic value, which profoundly links the past with the present, the visible with the invisible, the creature with the Creator; a call through beauty to transcendence.

The faithful need to be helped to perceive that the act of worship is not the fruit of activity, a product, a merit, a gain, but is the expression of a mystery, of something that cannot be entirely understood but that needs to be received rather than conceptualised. It is an act entirely free from considerations of efficiency. The attitude of the believer in the liturgy is marked by its capacity to receive (...) This attitude is no longer spontaneous in a culture where rationalism seeks to direct everything, even our most intimate sentiments.¹⁶⁷

The liturgical act encompasses and synthesizes the noblest forms of human expression: music, choreography, art, the word, along with elements of the cosmos in an epiphany of celebration and beauty. All of these dimensions are expressed within a sacred space that interprets the spirit of the liturgical act. The Liturgy itself unfolds in time and space, culminating in the highest form of mystical union possible on this earth. The innate search for the Absolute, for Beauty *par excellence* is entirely fulfilled. The Liturgy, in its timeless beauty and mysticism is the climactic human experience of the Absolute.

167) CONCLUDING DOCUMENT of the General Assembly, Op. Cit., III. 3.