

Liturgy as a ‘theological space’

Joseph SCHUMACHER¹

1. THE PROBLEM

In his **De locis theologicis**, published three years after his death, Melchior Cano († 1560) presented a ‘first systematic doctrine of theological knowledge’². The twelve books of the **De locis theologicis** constitute a classic work on theological knowledge, in which the author defines ten ‘theological loci’, that is to say, points of reference for the faith or sources of the science of the faith. According to the Church’s understanding, theology has a dual mandate: (1) to give systematic form to the faith of the Church and (2) to reflect upon that faith. To fulfil this dual task, it draws upon the *theological loci*. In this work, Melchior Cano does not merely list and describe these theological loci; he presents them systematically. For him, there are two ‘sources’ that constitute Revelation: Scripture and Tradition; five others which he says contain the interpretation of Tradition: the Catholic Church, the councils, the Roman Church or the Pope, the Church Fathers and the scholastic theologians; finally, he states that the last three are not specific to the Church and are non-theological: these are human reason – the *sana ratio* –, philosophy and history. For Cano, Revelation is therefore contained within Scripture and Tradition, which he describes as *loci constituentes*; it is presented by the Magisterium of the Church, by the councils and by the Pope, and attested to and explained by the Church Fathers and theologians – these are the *loci directivi*; finally, it is explored in greater depth and confirmed with the aid of reason, philosophy and history – these are the *loci alieni*.³

The liturgy is not found amongst Melchior Cano’s *loci theologici*, which is surprising: just like the Church Fathers and, fundamentally, all medieval theologians, Cano was aware of the importance of the liturgy insofar as it bears witness to the faith of the Church.⁴ Whilst he does not mention the liturgy, it must be noted, on the one hand, that in his work he does not expressly cite all the *loci theologici* – thus, for example, he does not mention the witnesses to the living faith and to Christian life; on the other hand, that, for him, Holy Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are, as it were, crystallised in the liturgy and that, according to his conception, the liturgy—regarded as a place of expression of the Church’s faith and of theology—is contained within the two *constituent loci* as well as within an important *locus directivus*, and therefore that, in a sense, the liturgy encompasses these three ‘places’. Added to this is the fact that the liturgy constitutes such a general criterion of faith that, in certain circumstances, it is difficult to deduce *in concreto* what the faithful must believe from what the liturgy says, particularly when one goes beyond the level of general statements on the faith – for example, concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the doctrine of

¹ Lecture delivered at the seventh CIEL symposium, 8–10 November 2001, in Versailles.

² Walter KERN, Franz-Josef NIEMANN: ‘Theologische Erkenntnislehre’, in: *Leitfaden Theologie* 4, Düsseldorf 1981, p. 49.

³ Anton HÄNGGI: ‘Loci theologici’, in: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Theologie und Philosophie* 4, 1957, p. 446.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 447–448.

the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, the mediation of the divine Logos, or the necessity of grace for the justification of humankind.⁵

As stated in **Sacrosanctum Concilium**, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, 'the liturgy is the summit towards which the Church's activity is directed, and at the same time the source from which all its power flows'.⁶ We might add: it is also the strength of the faith, both in form and in substance, insofar as it is at the same time a concrete expression of the faith professed.

According to the Church's understanding, the liturgy is also, from the very beginning and fundamentally, a confession of faith.⁷ However, whilst faith is communicated in the Church's liturgy, it must also be possible to deduce faith from the liturgy. Subordinate to and imbued with dogma,⁸ the liturgy is, as Romano Guardini puts it, a 'truth prayed', particularly with regard to the fundamental truths of the Christian faith,⁹ Dom Lambert Beauduin recognises in it 'the faith confessed, felt, prayed and sung'.¹⁰

Fundamentally, the liturgy is the most solemn form of the Church's confession and proclamation of the faith – and, as such, at the same time, the decisive form of the transmission of that faith.¹¹ Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) said: 'The liturgy contains the testimony of the true faith'.¹² Pope Pius XI, for his part, affirmed: 'Through the liturgy, we bear witness to our faith'.¹³ Pope Pius XII (1939–1958) wrote: 'In the sacred liturgy, we profess the Catholic faith expressly and openly [...] through the celebration of the mysteries, the offering of the sacrifice and the administration of the sacraments'.¹⁴ We can therefore see that, throughout history, the Church has incorporated important truths of the faith into the liturgy; furthermore, she has made certain of these truths the subject of specific liturgical feasts in order to emphasise their importance or to protect them against heretical deviations;¹⁵ and it is in this way that she has developed the liturgy and has never ceased to introduce new prayers and new

⁵ Cf. Josef PASCHER, 'Theologische Erkenntnis aus der Liturgie', in Josef RATZINGER, Heinrich FRIES: *Einsicht und Glaube – Festschrift für Gottlieb Söhngen*, Fribourg 1962, p. 256.

⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Articles 10–11; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Article 11.

⁷ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube – Eine theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung*, Fribourg (Switzerland) 1950, p. 103.

⁸ Romano GUARDINI: **On the Spirit of the Liturgy**, Fribourg 1957, p. 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Lambert BEAUDUIN, OSB: 'Essai de manuel fondamental de liturgie', in: *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 3, Leuven 1923, p. 143. Cf. Anton HÄNGGI: *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 447.

¹¹ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: 'Lex orandi, lex credendi in recentioribus documentis pontificiis', in: *Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica* 40, Rome 1951, p. 28.

¹² **Immensa aeterni Dei**; cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 22.

¹³ Apostolic Constitution **Divini cultus sanctitatem** of 20 December 1928; cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 22.

¹⁴ Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, p. 540 (edited by Pierre Téqui, pp. 36–37); cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 9.

¹⁵ Irénée DALMAIS: 'Liturgie und Glaubensgut', in: **Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft** – German translation edited by the Liturgical Institute of Trier, Freiburg 1963, pp. 242–243.

actions when one had explored a particular mystery of the faith and wished, in this way, to communicate it effectively to the people .¹⁶

In 1962, the liturgist Josef Pascher wrote that Latin was ‘the greatest obstacle to the effectiveness of the liturgy in fostering faith’; in his view, for the texts to ‘guide and strengthen the life of faith and reflection on the faith’, the people must understand them¹⁷ and, however, this obstacle can easily be overcome by translating these texts. Indeed, this is what was done well before the liturgical reform.

Furthermore, Pascher mentions another obstacle to the transmission of the faith through the liturgy: in his view, it would be wrong to claim that the precision of doctrinal statements can only be preserved in Latin .¹⁸ As an objection to the Latin liturgy, this claim is not convincing, any more than the claim that Latin, as a liturgical language, constitutes in itself an obstacle to the ‘doctrinal effectiveness’ of the liturgy. It is certainly true that one of the main problems facing the Church today stems from the frequent imprecision of theological discourse, which is itself due to a large extent to the abandonment of Latin in the Church and in theology.

It is in the Church’s worship that the binding tradition of the Church is manifested – a tradition which encompasses Sacred Scripture and the Church’s magisterium. Sacred Scripture is a qualified part of tradition, to which the magisterium gives its normative form.

The liturgy is the supreme expression of the Church’s tradition ,¹⁹ and the decisive form of its transmission.²⁰ Since the earliest centuries, the Church has regarded the worship she offers to God as an incomparable witness and as one of the surest forms of expression of the apostolic tradition ,²¹ which, in the Church’s view, makes this worship a particularly important *locus theologicus* of particular importance .²² This is, moreover, the unanimous view of the Fathers of ,²³ to whom the encyclical **Mediator Dei** expressly refers ,²⁴

The liturgy is not just any one ‘locus theologicus’ amongst others .²⁵ In the testimony of the liturgy we are given, as it were, the testimony of tradition in

¹⁶ Encyclical **Mediator Dei**, **Acta Apostolicae Sedis** 39, 1947, p. 542 (edited by Pierre Téqui, pp. 36–37); cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 23.

¹⁷ Josef PASCHER in: *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 257.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: ‘Der Gottesdienst als Locus theologicus’, in: *Kerygma und Dogma* 28, 1982, p. 248.

²⁰ Fernand CABROL: ‘The liturgy is one of the ways in which this tradition is expressed; we might say the principal way’ – article ‘Liturgy’ in: *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* IX, Paris 1926, p. 788. On this point, Cabrol quotes BOSSUET (in: **Instruction sur les états d’oraison**, Treatise I, Book VI, n. 1): ‘The principal instrument of the Church’s tradition is contained in her prayers’.

²¹ Irénée DALMAIS: ‘Liturgie und Glaubensgut’, *op. cit.* (note 14), p. 243.

²² There was a time when, in worship, the Church consciously emphasised (by setting limits on them) the truths of the faith in order to affirm them more effectively in the face of heterodox positions (cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 10).

²³ Bernard CAPELLE: ‘Autorité de la liturgie chez les Pères’, in: *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 21, 1954, p. 20.

²⁴ Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, pp. 540–541 (edited by Pierre Téqui, pp. 36–37); cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 10.

²⁵ Paul de CLERCK: ‘The Liturgy as a Theological Space’, in: Paul de CLERCK (ed.): *The Liturgy, a Theological Space*, Paris 1999, p. 134.

in its purest and most powerful form. Indeed, the liturgy embodies the ecclesial tradition of Revelation to a greater degree than other forms of transmission of the tradition.²⁶ Moreover, the Church identifies far more closely with her liturgy than with her theology.²⁷ It is precisely in its liturgy that the Church asserts itself, in a pre-eminent sense, as ‘the guardian of the truth, established by God and filled with the Spirit’.²⁸

As such, the liturgy is the highest bearer of ecclesial tradition,²⁹ and therefore takes its place immediately after Holy Scripture but before the Church Fathers. Compared with the testimony of the Church Fathers, the testimony of the liturgy possesses greater objectivity insofar as, in the liturgy, the entirety of the faith is reflected with greater internal rigour than in the testimony of the Fathers.³⁰ The liturgy is a living commentary on Scripture and, as such, it is closer to Scripture than all other testimonies of the Church’s faith.³¹ It is significant that the Church Fathers regarded the liturgy as a sort of **biblia pauperum**.³² But this does not mean, however, that the liturgy bears witness to all the truths of the faith.³³

Of course, in specific practical situations, the liturgy is binding for the faith only insofar as it bears witness to the constant and unanimous faith of the Church, and insofar as it expresses the faith of the ‘ecclesia universalis loco et tempore’. Whilst this is something that can be accepted a priori of all liturgical statements,³⁴ it must nevertheless be verified in practice where necessary,³⁵

The more solemn, ancient, universal and fundamentally linked to the very heart of worship a liturgical formula is, the more authentic and reliable is this manifestation of the Church’s faith in the liturgy. In this sense, the older the liturgical testimony, the more solemn and holy that testimony is within the Church’s liturgy, and the greater the authority of the liturgy for the faith – this is an idea we already find in Saint Augustine.³⁶ According to a principle that remains applicable to the argument from tradition, for the liturgy to attest that a doctrinal statement is certain, it must be clearly established that, throughout the ages, the universal Church has, in moral unity, affirmed or acknowledged that this truth certainly belonged to *the depositum fidei*. In such a case, according to the Church’s understanding

²⁶ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 122.

²⁷ Paul de CLERCK: ‘La liturgie comme lieu théologique’, in *op. cit.* (note 24), p. 134.

²⁸ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 18.

²⁹ Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 248.

³⁰ Fernand CABROL: ‘The liturgy must come immediately after Scripture, and before the Fathers, for its testimony—whether considered from the point of view of antiquity, universality or dignity—takes precedence over all others’ – *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 789.

³¹ Irénée DALMAIS: ‘Liturgie und Glaubensgut’, *op. cit.* (note 14), p. 241.

³² Cf. Bernard CAPELLE (note 22), pp. 7–8.

³³ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 10.

³⁴ **Catholic Adult Catechism: The Church’s Creed**, published by the German Bishops’ Conference, Kevelaer 1989, p. 53; Michael SCHMAUS: **Catholic Dogmatics I**, Munich 1948, pp. 124–125.

³⁵ Joseph PASCHER: *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 246.

³⁶ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 21–22; cf. Anton HÄNGGI (note 2), p. 447.

Having always possessed it of its own accord, the Church cannot err, for she is the Mystical Body of Christ .³⁷

Liturgical witness necessarily implies the internal continuity of the Church, and must always be considered within the context of apostolic succession. Just as with the mystery of the Church, the divine and the human are united in the liturgy. Whenever the liturgy appears as an expression of the Church's faith, it shares in the infallibility of the Church as a whole .³⁸

Whilst it is true that, frequently, the liturgy does not allow for a strictly scientific demonstration, no one can therefore assert that the liturgy contains errors contrary to the faith;³⁹ in fact, many liturgical texts are often remarkable for their theological precision, their incomparable conciseness and clarity, and their sober objectivity, especially when they belong to the most ancient tradition; one might cite, in this regard, the prayers of the Mass and the prefaces. In the field of the doctrine of the sacraments, the liturgy obviously plays a particularly important role as a source of knowledge: administering a sacrament is essentially a liturgical act .⁴⁰

When one wishes to evaluate liturgical testimonies from a theological perspective, one must, of course, on the one hand, consider them within their liturgical context but also, on the other hand, examine them in the light of history and comparative liturgy and situate them within their literary genre. A fundamental principle of textual interpretation is that texts must always be interpreted in accordance with what they intend to express. When using the liturgy as a source of knowledge of the faith, one must take into account the distinctive nature of liturgical language and the various literary genres. Very often, the language of the liturgy is not that of academic theology but rather that of prayer, devotion, the Gospel, proclamation and catechesis, or even the language of literature.

In each case, liturgical statements must be assessed in accordance with the principles otherwise applied to Sacred Scripture and Tradition; in particular, one must not seek a formula that is entirely precise 'when the text does not intend to make a doctrinal assertion or when there is no matter of divine faith '.⁴¹ Fundamentally, a text can only be entirely orthodox when it genuinely intends to set forth a truth of the faith or when it deals with something pertaining to the foundation of the faith. Thus, accuracy in the liturgy is relative. For example, one cannot attribute the same authority to the prayer for 22 July—which, in commemoration of Saint Mary Magdalene, states that she was the sister of Lazarus—as to the Preface for 15 August, the feast of the Assumption of Mary .⁴² What prevails in the liturgy is the spiritual meaning of Scripture. But it would be a mistake to set this spiritual meaning against the literal meaning of Scripture; indeed, that would be

³⁷ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 7–8.

³⁸ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 125.

³⁹ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 21–22; cf. Anton HÄNGGI (note 2), p. 447; Walter DÜRIG: 'Zur Interpretation des Axioms *Legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi*', in Anton Ziegenaus, Philip Schäfer, Franz Courth (eds.): *Veritati catholicae – Festschrift für Leo Scheffczyk*, Aschaffenburg 1985, p. 228.

⁴⁰ Joseph PASCHER: *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 246.

⁴¹ Karl FEDERER: article 'Lex orandi – Lex credendi', in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* VI, Fribourg, 2nd ed., 1961, p. 1002.

⁴² Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 5.

contravene the principles of theological knowledge. For exegetes, what is ultimately decisive is what the text fundamentally seeks to express .⁴³

Liturgical texts form part of the liturgy, but they do not in themselves constitute the whole of the liturgy. The liturgy is in fact composed of four elements .⁴⁴ Firstly, the liturgy is not a form of teaching but an *actio*: certainly, it is also teaching, but it is action. One of the weaknesses of the new liturgy, at least in its practical form, is that it places excessive emphasis on the word, on intellectual activity and on the pedagogical dimension. All too often, the proliferation of commentary turns it into a sort of catechesis and, in doing so, destroys its very essence; too many celebrants do not realise all that this entails .⁴⁵ The Church's liturgy is, first and foremost, a service of worship offered to God and, at the same time, a realisation of the mysteries of salvation – an effective realisation – whilst the texts are subordinate to it. This must be borne in mind .⁴⁶

Revelation is God's communication with humankind; humankind realises this communication through the response of faith, which is expressed concretely in prayer and worship, as well as in action inspired by faith. At the same time, however, the response of faith is also the proclamation of that faith, namely in the liturgy and in a life inspired by faith; yet, in both these dimensions, faith is proclaimed indirectly or secondarily, and this dual form of proclamation is in addition to the direct proclamation of faith. Yet the liturgy takes precedence over direct proclamation and Christian life – although it is also true that missionary preaching and Christian life are essential constituent elements of Christian existence. In Revelation, God wishes to communicate with humankind; but this communication finds its decisive expression in prayer and in the worship of God.

In this context, it must not be forgotten that the supreme exercise of the Church's extraordinary magisterium – the solemn definition of a truth of the faith – is above all a liturgical act. This is demonstrated by the act by which the bodily Assumption of the Most Holy Virgin Mary into heavenly glory was solemnly defined. The preparation for this definition was primarily the work of theological scholarship; but the definition itself was a liturgical act. The definition of Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven was adopted to glorify Almighty God and to honour his Son, with the intention of increasing the glory of the Mother of God for the joy and gladness of the whole Church. During the celebration accompanying this definition, litanies and the 'Veni Creator' were sung, and the Holy Spirit was invoked. Subsequently, the Pope proclaimed the new dogma. Then, through the subdeacon, the Church thanked the Pope, after which the 'Te' was sung

⁴³ Irénée DALMAIS, Antonin-Marcel HENRY: 'Die Liturgie II – Theologie und Liturgie', in: *Die Katholische Glaubenswelt* I, German translation by Lilo de' Negri and Herbert Vorgrimmler, Fribourg 1959, pp. 89–91; Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 10, 20–21; Joseph PASCHER: *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 246, 251.

⁴⁴ 'The liturgy of the Church comprises gestures, words, attitudes, acts and rites, all of which have theological significance. It is certain, for example, that genuflections and prostrations are a sign of adoration' (Fernand CABROL: *op. cit.* [note 19], p. 788).

⁴⁵ Joseph SCHUMACHER: 'Der *Denzinger* – Geschichte und Bedeutung eines Buches in der Praxis der neueren Theologie', in: *Freiburger theologische Studien* 95, Fribourg 1974, p. 299.

⁴⁶ Cf. Irénée DALMAIS, Antonin-Marcel HENRY: *op. cit.* (note 42), pp. 85–86.

Deum; this was followed by a homily, which was in turn followed by a general prayer. Finally, Mass was celebrated according to the formula for the new feast .⁴⁷

2. THE LITURGY AS *LOCUS THEOLOGICUS* IN THE HISTORY OF THE FAITH

In early Christian times, aware of the important role it played in the faith of the Church, many heretics altered the liturgy to bring it into line with their errors; consequently, the Church was, on each occasion, compelled to condemn such attempts .⁴⁸

In his **History of the Church**, Eusebius of Caesarea († 399) recounts that Paul of Samosata, who lived around the middle of the third century and denied the essential divinity of Jesus ,⁴⁹ had excluded the traditional Christological hymns from the liturgy and composed new ones to replace them ,⁵⁰

Throughout history, the doxology ‘Glory be to the Father’, which forms an important part of the Church’s liturgy, has been an expression of faith in the mystery of the Trinity, the fundamental mystery of the faith of the Church and of Christians .⁵¹ In the 4th century, the Arians argued from the formula: ‘Glory be to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit’ to claim that the Son was subordinate to the Father; thus Saint Basil the Great († 379) unhesitatingly replaced this formula with:

‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit’ .⁵²

In ancient times, the controversies between the Greeks and the Latins stemmed chiefly from liturgical differences, which in turn involved doctrinal differences. This is particularly evident in the case of the *Filioque*, when it was added to the *Creed* of the Mass; in the importance attached to the epiclesis in the Eucharistic celebration; in the use of unleavened bread; and in various other rites constituting the celebration of Mass and the sacrament of Baptism. In the Middle Ages, by rejecting traditional faith, the various sects stemming from Manichaeism—such as the Paulicians, the Waldensians, the Cathars and the Albigensians—were staunch opponents of the traditional liturgy. As for the new doctrine of the Reformers, it ultimately found its most significant expression in a new liturgy. In fact, every new dogmatic movement created its own liturgy .⁵³ Throughout history, religious groups that have separated from the Church for doctrinal reasons have tended to adapt the liturgy to their new doctrines; this was the case, in ancient times, with the Gnostics and the Arians, and, more recently, with the Gallicans and the Old Catholics .⁵⁴

⁴⁷ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42, 1950, pp. 700; 778–782; cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 27.

⁴⁸ ‘Further evidence of the dogmatic importance of the liturgy is that most heretics began by altering it to bring it into line with their errors, and that the Church was compelled to condemn these efforts’ (Fernand CABROL: *op. cit.* [note 19], p. 840).

⁴⁹ With his Christological errors, Paul of Samosata is regarded as a precursor of Nestorius (d. c. 451).

⁵⁰ EUSEBEUS OF CAESAREA: **Historia ecclesiastica**, Book VII, Chapter 30.

⁵¹ Fernand CABROL: *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 844.

⁵² BASIL THE GREAT: *Three Books Against Eunomius*, Book 2, n. 32; Book 2, n. 34; Book 3, 1; *On the Holy Spirit*, ch. 18, n. 45; cf. Josef PASCHER: *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 256; Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), pp. 254–255.

⁵³ Fernand CABROL: *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 842.

⁵⁴ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 23.

In his work **De rebus liturgicis**, published in Rome in 1671 and subsequently reprinted in 1676 under the title **Rerum liturgicarum II libri**, the Cistercian Cardinal Giovanni Bona († 1674) was well aware of this, writing: ‘Because they distorted the faith, the sects were characterised by the fact that they infected the liturgical books and rituals with their errors or even altered them on their own authority.’⁵⁵

Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 399) tells us that, in the ^{third} century, those who were fighting against the heresy of Adoptianism had expressly referred to the liturgical hymns which celebrated the essential divinity of Jesus.⁵⁶

During the Arian controversy, Saint Athanasius, Father of the Church († 373), asserted that the worship of Christ must be rejected as idolatrous if this Christ is not the Son of God and is therefore not God; but, for him, the Trinitarian formula of baptism clearly shows that he is the Son of God, and therefore God u.⁵⁷

To support the doctrine of original sin affirmed by the Church, Saint Augustine († 430) refers to the exorcisms of the baptismal liturgy, p. 58. For him, the liturgy is first and foremost a spontaneous testimony to the infallible faith of the praying Church. His teacher, Ambrose of Milan († 397), held the same view on this point, but placed greater emphasis on the influence of the Church’s magisterium. Whilst Ambrose regarded the liturgy more from the perspective of the celebrant’s active teaching, Augustine viewed it more from the perspective of the faithful’s passive faith;⁵⁹ he asserts that, behind the Church’s worship, lies the authority of the whole Church, which is filled with the Spirit and which, through the universal dissemination of a liturgy accepted by all, bears witness to its apostolic origin.⁶⁰ This unity and universality are also particularly emphasised by Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 450), a contemporary of Augustine, as for him these are the criteria of an authentic tradition of the Church: indeed, for him, what enables the truth of tradition to be verified are *universitas*, *antiquitas* and *consensio*.⁶¹

For Saint Jerome (d. 419), a liturgical practice that the whole Church agrees to preserve has as much value as an explicit testimony from the Bible; for him, therefore, liturgical testimony is as important as biblical testimony.⁶² In this sense, he regards, for example, the rite of confirmation as an apostolic tradition; he states: ‘Even where there is no testimony from Scripture, general and universal agreement is nevertheless equivalent to a prescription (of the Apostles)’.⁶³

⁵⁵ Book I, Chapter VII, 2: ‘It was characteristic of these sectarians that, having strayed from the faith, they would also corrupt ritual books either with their own errors or alter them on their own authority’; cf. Ferdinand CABROL: *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 840.

⁵⁶ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA: **Historia ecclesiastica**, Book V, Chapter 28.

⁵⁷ ATHANASIUS: *Epistula ad Adelphium*, nos. 3 ff.; *Epistula I ad Serapionem*, no. 24; 29 ff.; cf. Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), pp. 254–255.

⁵⁸ AUGUSTINE: **Contra Julianum**, Book 6, Chapter 5; cf. Walter DÜRIG: *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 226. Augustine states: ‘The Catholic Church would not use, for the children of the faithful, either exorcism or exsufflation if these did not free them from the power of darkness and the prince of death’ (*Contra Julianum*, Book 6, Chapter 5).

⁵⁹ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 47–62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶¹ VINCENT OF LÉRINS: *Commonitorium*, nos. 2 and 23.

⁶² Walter DÜRIG: *op. cit.* (note 38), pp. 228–229.

⁶³ JEROME: **Dialogus contra Luciferanos**, ch. 8.

From a theological perspective, Augustine († 430) follows in the footsteps of Ambrose of Milan († 397), but, moreover, the influence of the Church Fathers of his own country is of essential importance to him. He cites Optatus of Mileve († towards the end of the 4th century), Cyprian († 258) and Tertullian († after 220) as his references, and he traces the lineage of his spiritual forebears back to Irenaeus of Lyon (d. c. 202) and Justin (d. c. 165) and finally to the Apostolic Fathers.⁶⁴ Despite some differences in emphasis, they all emphasise the close relationship between liturgy and faith.⁶⁵

Opposing the Gnostics, Irenaeus of Lyon (d. c. 202) refers to the offering of bread and wine, their transformation through the Word, and Eucharistic communion to demonstrate the goodness of material creation and to justify the hope in the resurrection of the body;⁶⁶ Furthermore, when defending the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh against the dualist Gnostics, he refers to the Eucharist.⁶⁷

Similarly, Tertullian († after 220) sees in the liturgy of the sacraments of initiation as a source of theological assertions.⁶⁸ We can already find in his writings the essential elements of the proof through liturgy that Saint Augustine would later set out and apply: starting from certain concrete expressions of religious life, he deduces certain doctrinal truths;⁶⁹ Furthermore, he refers to the consensus omnium to support his argument in specific cases.⁷⁰ Like Irenaeus before him, Tertullian asserts that the liturgy allows one to conclude that matter is good and that the good God is its creator;⁷¹ like Irenaeus again, the resurrection of the dead is for him the consequence of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ – the Eucharistic elements.⁷² In his **De testimonio animae**, he explores these ideas in greater depth and shows that the proof provided by universal agreement on a particular question corresponds very generally to human thought and is therefore justified by the **conditio humana**,⁷³ adding that, in antiquity, this proof was generally accepted and was, in a sense, ‘in the air’. Viewed in this light, liturgical proof is, in a sense, referred back to the testimony of the soul.⁷⁴

In Tertullian’s time, to explain this universal agreement on ecclesiastical doctrine—this **consensus omnium**—it was accepted that, originally, this doctrine was one and that the Spirit

⁶⁴ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 123.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–62.

⁶⁶ IRENAEUS OF LYON: *Adversus Haereses*, Book 4, col. 18, n. 4 ff.; Book 5, ch. 2, n. 3; cf. Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 254.

⁶⁷ He writes: ‘How can they say that the flesh decays and has no part in life, this flesh which is nevertheless nourished by the Lord’s body and blood? Either they must change their view, or they must cease to offer this body and this blood. But our doctrine is in harmony with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms the doctrine’ (IRENAEUS OF LYON: *Adversus haereses*, Book 4, Chapter 18; cf. Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 95).

⁶⁸ TERTULLIAN: **De carnis resurrectione**, n. 8; cf. Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 254.

⁶⁹ TERTULLIAN: **Adversus Marcionem**, Book 1, n. 14; ID.: **De carnis resurrectione**, 8; cf. Karl Federer: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 78.

⁷⁰ TERTULLIAN: **Apologeticum**, 17; cf. Karl FEDERER: **Liturgie und Glaube** (note 6), pp. 79–83.

⁷¹ TERTULLIAN: **Adversus Marcionem**, Book 1, n. 14; Karl FEDERER: **Liturgie und Glaube** (note 6), p. 78.

⁷² TERTULLIAN: **De carnis resurrectione**, 8; cf. Karl FEDERER: **Liturgie und Glaube** (note 6), p. 78.

⁷³ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 107.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 77–80; 107–108.

preserved and maintained this original unity within the Church. In this sense, whenever a liturgical custom was accepted and practised throughout the Church, it was inferred that it had an apostolic origin, and therefore that it was supported by the authority of the Apostles. In doing so, one did not merely affirm the apostolic origin of this custom; one considered that this apostolic origin was guaranteed by the apostolic succession. It was held that doctrines or practices which did not form part of the substance of the faith but were nonetheless widespread throughout the Church were legitimised by the sound reasons implicit in why they had become customary. Be that as it may, for Tertullian, who was well aware that heresies each have their own tradition, the authority of traditional faith was founded not on custom but on truth.

As with Tertullian († after 220), we find in Irenaeus of Lyon († c. 202) this idea of the universality of tradition in relation to the correct understanding of Scripture and to apostolic tradition, the latter being legitimised by the succession of bishops, who alone were authorised to transmit it. The same is true of Polycarp of Smyrna (d. c. 156), of whom Irenaeus was a disciple, and of Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110), who had lived half a century earlier and is counted amongst the Apostolic Fathers.

Thus, Irenaeus points out that the Ebionites offer only water because, for them, mixing wine and water in the chalice symbolises the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, something in which they do not believe;⁷⁵ Similarly, Ignatius of Antioch refers to the Eucharist to defend the divine humanity of Jesus Christ against the spiritualist Docetists, when he states: ‘They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ’.⁷⁶

We can therefore see that, through Irenaeus of Lyon and Ignatius of Antioch, this idea of the universality of tradition dates back to the time when the New Testament writings were composed.⁷⁷

Augustine already resorts to liturgical evidence on several occasions when debating with the Donatists,⁷⁸ particularly when he affirms the sinful nature of the children of God⁷⁹ as well as God’s power over human free will,⁸⁰ which requires grace, though grace does not supplant free will,⁸¹. When he combats Pelagianism and, later, Semi-Pelagianism, Augustine puts forward liturgical evidence as a decisive argument. Drawing on the liturgy, he demonstrates the existence of original sin⁸² as well as the

⁷⁵ IRENAEUS OF LYON: **Adversus haereses**, Book 5, Chapter 1, Note 3.

⁷⁶ IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH: *Epistula ad Smyrnaeos*, 7, 1; cf. Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 96–97.

⁷⁷ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 87–95; cf. Cypriano VAGAGGINI: *Theologie der Liturgy*, Einsiedeln 1959, p. 351.

⁷⁸ For example, AUGUSTINE: **Contra epistulam Parmeniani**, Book 2, Chapter 10, n. 20; IDEM: **De baptismo**, Book 4, Chapter 23, n. 30; ID.: *Epistula 185*, c. 9, n. 39.

⁷⁹ AUGUSTINE: *Epistula 186*, ch. 9, n. 33; ID.: *Epistula 215*, n. 3.

⁸⁰ AUGUSTINE: **De praedestinatione sanctorum**, ch. 8, n. 15; ID.: **Epistula 215**, n. 3.

⁸¹ AUGUSTINE: **De praedestinatione sanctorum**, ch. 14, n. 27; ID.: **Epistula 177**, n. 3.

⁸² AUGUSTINE: *Epistula 194*, ch. 10, nos. 43–46.

the gratuitous nature of man's supernatural vocation ,⁸³. When he defends the canon of the ,⁸⁴ the eternity of hell ,⁸⁵ the offering of the Mass for the dead ,⁸⁶ and the existence of purgatory ,⁸⁷ he again refers to the liturgy

It should be noted that, generally speaking, Augustine employs liturgical evidence objectively and with a certain degree of restraint; thus, in the conclusions he draws from liturgical prayers, he does not go as far as we sometimes tend to do today. However, he struggles to set appropriate limits on liturgical evidence, particularly, for example, when, taking the dates of Christmas and Epiphany as his starting point, he deduces the dates of the historical events celebrated by these feasts⁸⁸. From this perspective, he is very much a product of his time .⁸⁹

Augustine expressly emphasises that the Church believes what she prays and that her prayers express her most intimate convictions. Of course, he is thinking here of the liturgy of the universal Church; but he does not forget that it is the duty of ecclesiastical authority to watch over the liturgy, precisely because of its importance for the faith .⁹⁰ He, too, moreover, oversees and monitors the doctrinal purity of the liturgy, and he expressly reminds the other bishops that this oversight and monitoring fall within their responsibility. For him, the guarantee that the liturgy bears error-free witness to the faith is provided both by the universal character of the liturgy and by the fact that the Magisterium watches over it attentively—an additional element which underpins its authority .⁹¹

It must be clearly understood that, whilst Augustine is convinced that there is harmony between the faith and the prayer of the Church, this is because, ultimately, he believes in the supernatural essence of the Church and in the ontological holiness that flows from it. The Church was founded by God, he explains, and is therefore a supernatural reality; thus the law of continuity applies to it, and consequently the continuity inherent in it is the decisive criterion of the truth of its doctrine. Drawing on this conception of the Church, Augustine therefore concludes that any custom found within the universal Church which has not been adopted by a council necessarily dates back to the Apostles ,⁹² even if it is not explicitly justified by a passage from

⁸³ AUGUSTINE: **De praedestinatione sanctorum**, ch. 19, n. 39; ch. 20, nn. 40–41; ch. 11, n. 22; ID.: *Enchiridion*, n. 32, 9; n. 81, 22; ID.: **De gratia et libero arbitrio**, ch. 13, n. 26; ID.: **De correptione et gratia**, ch. 6, n. 10; ID.: **De dono perseverantiae**, ch. 2, n. 3.

⁸⁴ AUGUSTINE: **De praedestinatione sanctorum**, ch. 14, n. 27.

⁸⁵ AUGUSTINE: **De civitate Dei**, Book 21, Chapter 24, n. 1.

⁸⁶ AUGUSTINE: **De haeresibus** 53; ID.: **Sermo** 297, n. 2, 3; ID.: **Enchiridion**, n. 110, 29.

⁸⁷ AUGUSTINE: **De cura pro mortuis gerenda**, ch. 1, n. 3; cf. Karl FEDERER: **Liturgie und Glaube** (note 6), pp. 22–25.

⁸⁸ AUGUSTINE: *Sermo* 203, n. 1, 1.

⁸⁹ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 25–26.

⁹⁰ AUGUSTINE: **De praedestinatione sanctorum**, ch. 19, n. 39; ID.: **Epistula 194**, ch. 10, n. 46; ID.: **De dono perseverantiae**, ch. 2, n. 3; ch. 23, n. 63; ID.: *Epistula 54*, ch. 5, n. 6; *Epistula 55*, ch. 15, n. 27; ch. 19, n. 35; ID.: *De haeresibus* 88.

⁹¹ Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 126.

⁹² AUGUSTINE: *Epistula 54*, ch. 1, n. 1.

Scripture⁹³ or even if it appears to contradict Scripture.⁹⁴ It therefore appears that, for him Furthermore, evidence of prayer and liturgy is, fundamentally, evidence of tradition and authority.⁹⁵

More specifically, the relationship between liturgy and faith has been expressed, since early Christian times, by the axiom: *'lex orandi – lex credendi'*. This formula is undoubtedly expressive but, in this form, it is not very clear: depending on whether one takes the first or the second part of the phrase as the subject, it can mean: 'liturgy is the norm of faith' or 'faith is the norm of prayer'.⁹⁶ But it becomes clearer if quoted in its original form, as found in the **Indiculus de gratia Dei** by Prosper of Aquitaine († after 455). It reads: *'Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi'*, which can be translated as: 'The law of prayer must determine the law of faith', or alternatively as: 'The law of prayer is a law for faith'.⁹⁷ In the introduction to this **Indiculus de gratia Dei**, Prosper of Aquitaine begins by noting that the Semi-Pelagians reject the doctrine, affirmed by the Church, that grace is not merited and that it is necessary for faith to arise, and that, consequently, they claim they can only accept the decisions of the Holy See and the councils. Prosper therefore quotes, in the first six chapters of his work, the testimonies of several popes and councils who have spoken on this point. Subsequently, in chapters 8 and 9, he presents the testimony of the liturgy, thereby adding to what he calls the 'inviolable decisions' of the Apostolic See and the councils the 'holy' testimony of the Church's prayers and intercessions, 'handed down by the Apostles', which are recited throughout the world or in every community and which cannot therefore be based on error. It is interesting to note that, here, Prosper attaches just as much importance to the 'holy' testimony of the Church's prayers and intercessions as to the *'auctoritates'* of which he spoke previously: the popes and the councils.⁹⁸

Addressing the Semi-Pelagians, Prosper points out that, given the axiom *'legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi'* is accepted, the necessity of intercessory prayer for all people—for pagans, for Jews and for heretics—a requirement set out both by the Apostle (1 Tim 2:1–4) and by the Church—means that one must believe in the necessity of grace. This means that the apostolic injunction to intercede for all proves that grace is necessary for all people for faith to arise. For Prosper, the apostolic origin

⁹³ AUGUSTINE: **De baptismo**, Book 4, Chapter 24, n. 31.

⁹⁴ AUGUSTINE: *Epistula 54*, ch. 6, nos. 7–8.

⁹⁵ KARL FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 29–33.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Chapter 8: PL 51, 209–210 and Denzinger/Schönmetzer no. 246. *The Indiculus* was not written by Pope Celestine I (422–432); rather, it must be attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, a disciple of Augustine († 430). This work is therefore supported by the authority not only of a pope but also of a Church Father. The 8th chapter of the *Indiculus* has a parallel in the work of PROSPER OF AQUITAINE: **De vocatione gentium**, Book 1, Chapter 12 (PL 51, 664–665), written between 435 and 442. See Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 5–6; KARL FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 9–10; 18.

⁹⁸ KARL FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 11–12.

The inclusion of intercessory prayers is justified, on the one hand, by the text of 1 Tim 2:1–4 and, on the other hand, by the fact that these prayers are recited unanimously throughout the Church.⁹⁹

In the same work, Prosper of Aquitaine establishes the existence and universality of original sin by referring to the liturgy, and more specifically to the rite of baptism; he then deduces from liturgical prayers and liturgical actions in general what the *sensus Ecclesiae* is and what, consequently, must be *eruitur*.¹⁰⁰

Here again, therefore, the tradition and authority of the Church appear as decisive elements of the liturgical proof.

Whilst it was Prosper of Aquitaine who coined the phrase: '*legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*', in substance this idea stems from his teacher Augustine († 430).¹⁰¹ Following in the footsteps of Cyprian of Carthage († 258), Augustine did indeed develop these concepts of the *lex orandi* and

the *lex credendi* in his controversy with the Semi-Pelagians;¹⁰² he refers explicitly expressly to the Church's prayers to prove that a person's conversion originates with God and that perseverance is a grace. In particular, he observes: 'For if the Church were to ask the Lord for such graces whilst living in the conviction that she derived these graces solely from herself, one would then have to say that her prayers are not well-founded but absurd'.¹⁰³ Just like Prosper of Aquitaine, Augustine derives a law of faith from the law of prayer, which is evident when, for example, he writes: 'In itself, prayer is the clearest proof of grace.'¹⁰⁴

That said, for Augustine, the law of prayer is the law of faith because, for him, the law of faith is the law of prayer. If one understands the axiom '*lex orandi – lex credendi*' in its context, one realises that the statement implies its inverse. Whilst expressing the faith of the Church, the liturgy – the prayer of the Church – necessarily presupposes that faith. However, in many cases, the Church's worship precedes faith insofar as it often helps to make it explicit and to develop it. Indeed, according to the Catholic understanding,

⁹⁹ See Walter DÜRIG: *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 226. Whilst, for Prosper, the obligation to pray for all implies that grace is necessary for faith to arise, this relationship of dependence is not, however, absolute; indeed, whilst prayer for all is justified and required, it does not necessarily follow that it is impossible to attain faith without the grace sought (cf. *ibid.*). But what is at issue here is the principle itself, the liturgical evidence which, ultimately, derives its foundation from the tradition and authority of the Church.

¹⁰⁰ Karl FEDERER: article '*Lex orandi – Lex credendi*' (note 40), pp. 1001–1002; ID: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 14–18; 123.

¹⁰¹ Prosper of Aquitaine is regarded as a disciple of Augustine; although he never met him, he ardently defended Augustine's conception of grace. He also wrote several letters to him in which, amongst other things, he set out the positions of his Semi-Pelagian opponents. In response to Prosper's request that he refute the semi-Pelagians' assertions, Augustine wrote two letters to Prosper and Hilary: **De praedestinatione sanctorum** and **De dono perseverantiae** (Karl FEDERER: **Liturgie und Glaube** [note 6], p. 19).

¹⁰² AUGUSTINE: **De dono perseverantiae**, ch. 23, nos. 63–64, and **Epistula 217**.

¹⁰³ AUGUSTINE: **De dono perseverantiae**, ch. 23, n. 63 and **Epistula 217**, ch. 7, n. 29; cf. Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 34–35; Walter Dürig: *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 227.

¹⁰⁴ '*Ipsa igitur oratio clarissima est gratiae testificatio*' (AUGUSTINE: *Epistula 177*, ch. 4); cf. Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 38–39. When one compares Augustine's *Epistula 217* with Prosper of Aquitaine's *Indiculus*, one finds such similarities in form and content that one can certainly conclude there is a literary dependence between the two. That said, Prosper of Aquitaine clarified the '*lex orandi – lex credendi*' argument and formulated it more effectively by applying it more specifically to liturgical intercessory prayer, emphasising that it was a principle accepted throughout the universal Church and relating this argument to an injunction by the Apostle Paul (Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* [note 6], pp. 39–40; 123).

In the history of dogma, the liturgy is the decisive foundation for the development of the faith. More precisely, this deepening of the Catholic Church's faith occurs above all through the *sensus christianus* or the *sensus fidelium*; this is an innate understanding of the faith, an understanding of the faith that stems first and foremost from grace and not from the intellect or the theoretical knowledge of the believer; it is a higher form of perception to which 'co-existence' with the liturgy makes one receptive. In the liturgy, the Church lives with the mysteries; she cultivates living relationships with them. Thus the liturgy is, in a sense, the nourishing ground of the *sensus christianus* or the *sensus fidelium*.¹⁰⁵

We can therefore see that the Church Fathers attribute significant authority to the liturgy with regard to the faith of the Church. Consequently, they often refer to it to dispel doctrinal uncertainties and to repel the attacks of the faith's adversaries. In countless controversies, particularly with the Donatists and Pelagians, but also concerning Trinitarian and Christological doctrines, they constantly appealed to the testimony of the liturgy.¹⁰⁶

Later, John Henry Newman († 1890) would say that, together, the Church's ritual and Holy Scripture constitute 'a treasure of faith and piety';¹⁰⁷ one is justified in thinking that this statement reflects the conclusions he drew from his intensive study of the Church Fathers, whom he says led him to the Roman Church.¹⁰⁸ And it is precisely because he made himself a diligent student of the Church Fathers that, in his writings, he has always maintained that the liturgy is a testimony to the Church's doctrinal tradition.¹⁰⁹

Whilst the Church Fathers were the first to regard the liturgy as an important *locus theologicus*, this attitude persisted throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern era. Thomas Aquinas († 1274), described as *the Universal Doctor* of the Church, can be seen as representing many of those who defended the *sacra doctrina*, particularly in the Middle Ages; indeed, he consistently emphasises, quite naturally, the importance of the liturgy as a source of knowledge for the faith of the Church and for theology. Undoubtedly, he places the liturgy on a par with Holy Scripture and recognises its value as far superior to that of the authority of the Church Fathers. For him, the authority of the liturgy is the authority of tradition, which derives its normative character from the infallible Magisterium of the Church; the liturgy is *the authentic consuetudo Ecclesiae*, established by the faith of the Church. It is

¹⁰⁵ Cypriano VAGAGGINI: *op. cit.* (note 76), pp. 308–312.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 348–350. Whilst the Church Fathers were interested in the relationship between the liturgy and faith, or in the relationship between faith and the liturgy, it was not this aspect of the liturgy alone that held their attention; in reality, their interest lay much more in the mysterious inner nature of the liturgy, in the character of mystery inherent in the worship that the Church offers to God (cf. *ibid.*).

¹⁰⁷ John Henry NEWMAN: *Entwurf einer Zustimmungsllehre*, in Mathias Laros and Werner Becker (eds.): *Selected Works* VII, Mainz 1961, p. 95.

¹⁰⁸ John Henry NEWMAN: 'Letter to Pusey', in: *John Henry Newman – Polemical Writings – Essays on Contemporary Issues and the Doctrine of the Faith*, Mathias Laros and Werner Becker (eds.): *Selected Works* IV, Mainz 1961, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ *John Henry Newman – Polemical Writings – Essays on Contemporary Issues and Doctrine of the Faith*, Mathias Laros and Werner Becker (eds.): *Selected Works* IV, Mainz 1959, p. 262; cf. pp. 256, 264–265, 289; John Henry NEWMAN: *On the Development of the Doctrine of the Faith*, Mathias Laros and Werner Becker (eds.): *Selected Works* VIII, Mainz 1969, p. 110.

Thus, a ‘place’ where the faith of the Church is expressed, the Church expressing itself through that place.¹¹⁰ We can see that Thomas thus clearly sets out the traditional doctrine of the Church on this point, and this doctrine remains valid today.

For Thomas Aquinas, the liturgy is an important *locus theologicus*. His **Summa Theologiae** is a veritable treasure trove for liturgical theology: in this single work alone, he cites the liturgy fifty-seven times as a source of dogmatic authority. He emphasises, however, that this authority must always be in keeping with the faith of the Church and the decisions of the Magisterium. He asserts that Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are inseparable. He states elsewhere that the faithful, whether educated or not, must explicitly accept only those truths of the faith which the

Church’s liturgy celebrates the feast.¹¹¹ For Thomas, the Preface for the feast of the Most Holy Trinity is an important argument in favour of the doctrine that, in God, the being of relation is identical to the being of essence. For him, what makes the liturgy lead to the truth is manifested precisely in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity. And this is why he considers the numerous signs of the cross that once characterised the sacrifice of the Mass to be entirely appropriate: they express the sufferings and sacrificial death of Jesus and thus constantly point to what the Mass fundamentally is: the actualisation of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, x.¹¹² In his commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, speaking of the elevation of the host at the moment of consecration – a common and universal rite – he concludes from this rite that transubstantiation takes place immediately after the words of consecration have been spoken on.¹¹³

3. THE POSITIONS OF THE MAGISTERIUM

From time immemorial and right up to the modern era, the Church has been aware of the importance of the liturgy as a *locus theologicus* – as a place where theology and faith are expressed. Admittedly, this idea has not always been expressed in the same way, but it has always existed. In fact, it was at the beginning of the modern era that it reasserted itself, developing in the nineteenth century against the backdrop of liturgical renewal and the liturgical movement that sprang from it, no.¹¹⁴ But this does not mean that liturgical evidence was forgotten in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: at that time, particular reference was made to Prosper of Aquitaine († after 455) in order to regard the Church’s worship as a *locus theologicus*, alongside Holy Scripture. By the mid-18th century, to justify Catholic dogmas in the face of Protestantism, it had become common practice to draw arguments from the liturgy;

¹¹⁰ Lydia MAIDL: **Desiderii interpres – Genese und Grundstruktur der Gebetstheologie des Thomas von Aquinas**, Paderborn 1994, pp. 71–72; cf. David BERGER: *Thomas Aquinas and the Liturgy*, Centre International d’Études Liturgiques, Paris 2001, pp. 19–20.

¹¹¹ David BERGER: *op. cit.* (note 109), p. 20; cf. Walter HOERES: *Eine theologische Erkenntnislehre von the highest order* (review in: **Die Tagespost**, 29 April 2000); Cypriano VAGAGGINI: *op. cit.* (note 76), pp. 327–330; 333–334.

¹¹² David BERGER: *op. cit.* (note 109), p. 22.

¹¹³ THOMAS AQUINAS: *In Epistolam I ad Corinthios*, XI, 6; cf. Walter DÜRIG: *op. cit.* (note 38), pp. 229–230.

¹¹⁴ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 11; cf. Anton HÄNGGI: *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 447, 449; Karl FEDERER: article ‘Lex credendi – lex orandi’ (note 40), p. 1002; ID.: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 2.

and the popes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, following in the footsteps of their predecessors¹¹⁵, in turn, clearly emphasised the authority of the liturgy.¹¹⁶ As early as the 16th century, Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) had expressly affirmed the importance of the liturgy for the faith, as did, in the 19th and 20th centuries, Popes Pius IX (1846–1878), Pius XI (1932–1939) and Pius XII (1939–1958) also did so in the 19th and 20th centuries.

This issue was addressed by Sixtus V in the encyclical **Immensa Aeterni Dei** of 22 January 1587, as well as in the **Institutio quidecim congregationum [...] cardinalium**,¹¹⁷ by Pius IX in the bull **Ineffabilis Deus** of 8 December 1854 on the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on,¹¹⁸ by Pius XI in the encyclical **Quas primas** of 11 December 1925 on the institution of the feast of Christ -King¹¹⁹ and in the encyclical **Divini cultus** of 20 December 1928, devoted to the promotion of the liturgy, Gregorian chant and sacred music,¹²⁰ and finally by Pius XII in the encyclical **Divino afflante Spiritu** of 30 September 1943, which deals with the development of biblical studies,¹²¹ in the encyclical **Mediator Dei** of 20 November 1947, devoted to the liturgy,¹²² as well as in the Apostolic Constitution **Munificentissimus Deus** of 1 November 1950, concerning the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.¹²³

The ancient maxim: *'Lex orandi – lex credendi'* is cited by Pope Pius IX in the bull **Ineffabilis Deus** of 8 December 1854, in which the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is proclaimed, and by Pope Pius XII in the Apostolic Constitution **Munificentissimus Deus** of 1 November 1950, concerning the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.¹²⁴

In 1850, in his **Memoir on the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Virgin**, Dom Guéranger clearly recalled the axiom of Prosper of Aquitaine († after 455): *'Lex orandi statuat legem credendi'*; he applied it consistently and logically to this question and, in so doing, he made no small contribution to the definition of the dogma of , 1854.¹²⁵ It is therefore not surprising that Pope Pius IX incorporated this axiom into the very text of the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December 1854 and relied upon it; he argues that the liturgical celebration of this feast preceded theological reflection, and he asserts that the liturgy demonstrates that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary has been established since the earliest times, that it has taken root in the hearts of the faithful and that, thanks to the

¹¹⁵ Walter DÜRIG: *op. cit.* (note 38), pp. 230–231; Cypriano VAGAGGINI: *op. cit.* (note 76), pp. 317–318.

¹¹⁶ Irénée DALMAIS: *Liturgie und Glaubensgut* (note 14), pp. 243 ff.

¹¹⁷ *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum Romanorum Pontificum, Turin edition 1863*, VIII, 989.

¹¹⁸ *Acta Pii IX*, vol. I, Rome 1854, pp. 598–599.

¹¹⁹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 17, 1925, p. 598.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21, 1929, pp. 33–34.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 35, 1943, p. 311.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 39, 1947, pp. 540–541.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 42, 1950, pp. 758–760; cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 6–7; Anton HÄNGGI: *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 449.

¹²⁴ Karl FEDERER: article *'Lex orandi – lex credendi'* (note 40), p. 1001.

¹²⁵ Anton HÄNGGI: *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 449.

Thanks to the diligence and efforts of the pastors, it was proclaimed in a remarkable manner throughout the Catholic world .¹²⁶

In 1925, in his encyclical *Quas Primas* on the institution of the Feast of Christ the King, Pius XI wrote: ‘To teach the people the matters of the faith [...], the annual celebration of the holy mysteries is far more effective than all the documents of the Church’s Magisterium, even the most important ones’.¹²⁷

In his encyclical **Divino afflante Spiritu**, published in 1943, Pope Pius XII, in defence of the spiritual meaning of Scripture, referred to New Testament hermeneutics, the Church Fathers and the liturgy, citing in particular the principle: ‘*Lex orandi – lex credendi*’.¹²⁸ Two years earlier, in a letter to the bishops of Italy, the Biblical Commission had already emphasised the importance of the liturgy as *a locus theologicus*, stating that the liturgy characterises the normative tradition of the Church and thereby gives liturgical evidence its rightful place.¹²⁹

In his encyclical **Mediator Dei**, published in 1947,¹³⁰ Pope Pius XII declared that the liturgy is an important ‘place’ for the truths of the faith and for their proper understanding, adding, however, that it must be verified by the faith of the Church and by the doctrinal declarations of the Church’s Magisterium.¹³¹ He expressly emphasises that the liturgy ‘does not define or establish the Catholic faith absolutely’ – a faith which is proclaimed by the supreme Magisterium of the Church – but that it professes it. Pius XII further emphasises that the axiom ‘*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* – Let the rule of prayer determine the law of belief’ can therefore rightly be reversed to read: ‘*Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi* – Let the rule of belief determine the law of prayer’. In this context, the Pope declares that the organisation of the liturgy, its external and internal enrichment, and the introduction of new rites are the sole responsibility of the Church’s hierarchy.¹³² By thus recalling the close internal relationship that unites the liturgy, Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church, he stands fully in the continuity of the Church’s faith as it has developed since the time of the Church Fathers.

¹²⁶ Bull **Ineffabile Deus**, in: **Acta Pii IX**, vol. I (note 117), pp. 598–599; cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 8.

¹²⁷ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 17, 1925, p. 603.

¹²⁸ This is exactly what he says: ‘Now this meaning is indicated and taught to us by our divine Saviour himself in the Holy Gospels; it is also this meaning that the Apostles, following the Master’s example, openly point out in their words and writings; it is this meaning that the unbroken tradition of the Church reveals; and it is this meaning, finally, that the ancient practice of the liturgy expresses whenever one is justified in applying, as is proper, the well-known adage: ‘The rule of prayer is the rule of faith’ (Denzinger no. 3828; cf. *Enchiridion Biblicum* no. 552).

¹²⁹ *Letter from the Biblical Commission to the Bishops of Italy* (20 August 1941): Denzinger no. 3792.

¹³⁰ Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947 (ed. Pierre Téqui).

¹³¹ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, pp. 540–541 (Pierre Téqui [ed.], pp. 36–38); cf. Karl FEDERER: article ‘*Lex orandi – lex credendi*’ (note 40), p. 1001.

¹³² *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, p. 541: ‘*The Sacred Liturgy, therefore, neither defines nor establishes the Catholic faith by its own authority ; rather, since it is also a profession of heavenly truths, subject to the Supreme Magisterium of the Church, it can provide arguments and testimonies—of no small significance indeed—for discerning the specific nature of a particular aspect of Christian doctrine*’ (p. 541) (Pierre Téqui [ed.], pp. 37–38). See also Paul de CLERCK: ‘*Lex orandi – lex credendi*’, in: *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 59, Leuven 1978, p. 193.

During the solemn proclamation in 1950 of the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven, the Pope again referred to the relationship between the liturgy and faith:¹³³ He noted that Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven is universally accepted and that it is expressed in a particularly brilliant manner in the liturgy of this feast.¹³⁴

The Second Vatican Council elaborates on these ideas in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, where it affirms that 'the governance of the liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church: it belongs [first and foremost] to the Apostolic See and [thereafter], in accordance with the rules of law, to the bishop' as well as to the territorial episcopal conferences.¹³⁵ And the document goes on to state succinctly: 'For this reason, absolutely no one else, not even a priest, may, on his own initiative, add, remove or alter anything in the liturgy'.¹³⁶

This idea is reiterated in the Church's new Code of Canon Law, published in 1983, which states that 'the ordering of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church [...] held by the Apostolic See and, in accordance with the law, by the diocesan bishop'.¹³⁷ In this regard, the Code of Canon Law specifies that 'liturgical actions are not private actions [...] but that they concern the whole body of the Church, manifest it and bring it to fruition',¹³⁸ which, it must be admitted, is often not the case in
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Because the liturgy manifests the faith, it is the faith that must govern the liturgy. But the liturgy can manifest the faith only to the extent that the formal expression of that faith is given to it by the Magisterium of the Church.

4. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernism misinterpreted the traditional principle: '*Lex orandi – lex credendi*': it relied on this principle to attempt to justify the view that dogma is not created by objective revelation but by subjective religious experience; consequently, whilst still claiming to apply this principle, modernism abandoned the realm of objective faith and made religious experience

¹³³ Bull **Munificentissimus Deus** of 1 November 1950 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42, 1950, pp. 758–759).

¹³⁴ '*Universali autem ac splendidiore modo haec sacrorum Pastorum ac christifidelium fides (de Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) is manifested in the Liturgy*' – *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42, 1950, p. 758; cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 11.

¹³⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 22; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 15; in this document, bishops are described as '*moderatores, promotores et custodes*' of the Church's liturgical life.

¹³⁶ '*Quapropter nemo omnino alius, etiam sit sacerdos, quidquam proprio Marte in Liturgia addat, demat, or alter.*' (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 22); see also the Apostolic Constitution of Pius XI, **Divini cultus sanctitatem**, of 20 December 1928.

¹³⁷ *Codex Iuri Canonici* (1983), c. 838.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, c. 837.1.

¹³⁹ In recent decades, statements from Rome have frequently emphasised that the liturgy must be organised in accordance with the Catholic Church's overall understanding of itself, and that ultimate responsibility for the liturgy rests with the Church's highest representative: the holder of the Chair of Peter; this was, moreover, reiterated as recently as 2001 in the instruction **Liturgiam authenticam** issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship. It should be noted that such documents have always provoked critical reactions, particularly in Central Europe.

subjective a dogma, and thus the norm of the faith. By thereby making the liturgy, in a one-sided manner, the *lex credendi* and attributing to it an authority it does not possess, the proponents of this view have taken this principle out of context and have forgotten the traditional faith of the Church.¹⁴⁰ The encyclical **Mediator Dei** expressly mentions this view, and it categorically states that the liturgy neither designates nor establishes the faith but bears witness to it, and that, when defining truths of the faith and discussing controversial issues, the popes and councils often referred to the liturgy because, for them, it was a testimony to the faith that had been handed down to them.¹⁴¹ On this point, the encyclical makes it expressly that the liturgy presupposes faith, that faith comes before the liturgy and that, consequently, it ‘does not define or establish the Catholic faith absolutely and by its own authority’;¹⁴² in other words, in the Catholic Church’s view, the liturgy does not call for dogma but recalls it.¹⁴³

It was not only 19th- and 20th-century modernism that challenged this position: this attitude is frequently found within Reformed Christianity, which readily affirms the primacy of the *lex orandi* over the *lex credendi* from both a historical and a systematic perspective. It is argued, for example, that, in the history of the Church, the liturgy has always been a factor in the development of the faith, and that the Church’s liturgical practice has been transposed into theology and used as a source for dogmatic decisions.¹⁴⁴ Or it is further asserted that, in accordance with the axiom: ‘*legem credendi statuatur lex supplicandi*’, it is ‘the prayer life of the universal Church, filled with the Spirit’ that must determine dogma, p. 145. This position is explained by the fact that, given the particular conception it has of the Church, Reformed Christianity interprets the concept of tradition in a different sense; the problem is that it fails to take into account the fact that, from the earliest times, the Magisterium of the Church has been understood as an integral part of tradition. It is therefore not surprising that the Protestant position finds supporters amongst certain Catholic theologians.¹⁴⁶

It is true that the position of these reformers is not very consistent insofar as, ultimately, they acknowledge that theology has a critical role to play with regard to liturgical practice, namely when, as they say, there is a lack of coherence between liturgy and theology.¹⁴⁷ In this case, the authority of theology is, for them, the authority of Holy Scripture – which is typically Protestant.

¹⁴⁰ Karl FEDERER: article ‘Lex orandi – lex credendi’ (note 40), p. 1002.

¹⁴¹ Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (note 82), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, pp. 540 ff. (Pierre Téqui [ed.], p. 37); cf. Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 17.

¹⁴² ‘*Sacra igitur Liturgia catholicam fidem absolute suaque vi neque designat nec constituit*’ – Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (note 82), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, p. 541 (Pierre Téqui [ed.], p. 37); cf. Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 2–3; Walter DÜRIG (note 38), p. 236.

¹⁴³ Leo SCHEFFCZYK: *Grundlagen des Dogmas – Einleitung in die Dogmatik* (in: Leo Scheffczyk and Anton Ziegenaus [eds.]: **Katholische Dogmatik I**, Aachen 1997, p. 156, note 46).

¹⁴⁴ Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 255.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 253–254.

¹⁴⁶ See Teresa BERGER: ‘Lex orandi – lex credendi’, in: *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, Regensburg 27, 1985, pp. 425–432.

¹⁴⁷ Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 252.

The Catholic view also acknowledges that the liturgy can be amended: not by theology, but by the Magisterium of the Church. Indeed, such amendment is necessary and ongoing because, for the Catholic Church, the liturgy is founded on the authority of the Magisterium, which is responsible for the normative interpretation of Holy Scripture and the ordering of the liturgy.¹⁴⁸

It is in this context that we must situate the idea that, from a Protestant perspective, the Reformation can be regarded as ‘a doctrinal revolt against the liturgical and paraliturgical practices’ of the late Middle Ages ‘which expressed a false conception of God, man and salvation’.¹⁴⁹ The fact is that almost all the 16th-century Reformers established a new liturgical order in order to re-express ‘the pure Gospel’ – as we have already discussed.¹⁵⁰ To this end, the Reformers appealed to Holy Scripture; whilst they undoubtedly asserted that it should be proclaimed and interpreted in worship, they also recognised a certain autonomy for it, so that, in relation to the liturgy, Holy Scripture might act as a critical authority.¹⁵¹

But it would be to misunderstand the nature of the relationship between faith and the liturgy to reduce the liturgy to the mere role of an instrument of the Church’s Magisterium. In the history of dogma, there are instances – particularly in the field of Mariology – where the liturgy far preceded the decision of the Magisterium.¹⁵² We must here draw a distinction between the ordinary Magisterium and the extraordinary Magisterium: doctrinal decisions are acts of the extraordinary Magisterium; the ordinary Magisterium is responsible for the day-to-day proclamation of the Church’s faith. This responsibility rests with the bishops and the Pope; indeed, in certain cases, they may also jointly assume the responsibility of the extraordinary Magisterium. The Pope exercises the office of the extraordinary magisterium through a cathedral decree, the bishops through a conciliar decree. The extraordinary magisterium does not take precedence over the liturgy, whereas the ordinary magisterium does: indeed, strictly speaking, the liturgy is founded on the ordinary magisterium. In an audience on 12 December 1935, Pope Pius XI stated that the liturgy was

‘the most important organ of the ordinary Magisterium of the Church’.¹⁵³

The *lex credendi* takes precedence over the *lex supplicandi* and ‘determines it according to its spirit and meaning’.¹⁵⁴ This has always been the conviction of the Church. Consequently, the liturgy or worship of the Church is the law of faith because faith is the law of the liturgy or prayer of the Church.¹⁵⁵ It is the guarantee of the ordinary – and not the extraordinary – magisterium of the Church, which is

¹⁴⁸ ‘[...] is subject to the supreme Magisterium of the Church’ – encyclical **Mediator Die** (note 52), in: **Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 39, 1947, p. 541 (Pierre Téquie [editor], p. 37).

¹⁴⁹ Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 252.

¹⁵⁰ See above, note 52.

¹⁵¹ Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT: *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 252.

¹⁵² Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), p. 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 2; Walter KERN, Franz-Josef NIEMANN: *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 153–154.

¹⁵⁴ Leo SCHEFFCZYK: *Grundlagen des Dogmas* (note 142), p. 146, note 46; ID.: *Katholische Glaubenswelt*, Aschaffenburg 1977, p. 43. See also the papal bull *Munificentissimus Deus*, in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42, 1950, p. 760: ‘*Quaquidem vero Ecclesiae Liturgia catholicam non gignit fidem, sed eam potius consequitur, ex eaque, ut ex arbore fructus sacri cultus ritus proferentur.*’

¹⁵⁵ Karl FEDERER: article ‘Lex orandi – lex credendi’ (note 40), pp. 1001–1002; cf. Bernard CAPELLE: *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 5–8; Karl FEDERER: *Liturgie und Glaube* (note 6), pp. 108–109.

given to liturgical witness;¹⁵⁶ this witness presents to us the exercise of the Church's ordinary magisterium in its highest form, and this is why it can legitimately be said that the law of prayer determines the law of faith.¹⁵⁷ But the fact is that, ever more frequently, the ordinary magisterium is expressed less clearly in the liturgy than in other means of transmitting the faith, and for theologians faced with a specific case, it is sometimes difficult to rely on what the liturgy teaches, particularly when it comes to determining whether and to what extent what the liturgy says is normative from the point of view of the faith. It should not be forgotten, in this regard, that the acts of the ordinary Magisterium

do not always possess the character of infallibility.¹⁵⁸ (Generally, acts of the ordinary Magisterium possess the character of infallibility, but not always. One might even say that they **ought** to possess this character. Infallibility is attached to the words of the bishops or the Pope when they teach what constitutes the true faith of the Catholic Church, or when the bishops teach the same faith universally in mutual communion and in communion with the Pope, whilst professing the true faith of the Church. The ordinary Magisterium is linked to the witness of the faith; the extraordinary Magisterium is linked to judgement on matters of faith. The profession of the faith possesses the character of infallibility when it is truly the witness to what the Church believes throughout the world, when the bishops teach unanimously and in communion with the Pope.

It must also be borne in mind that the liturgy neither bears witness to the faith nor proclaims it in the same way as other (non-liturgical) means of transmitting the faith, such as catechisms, encyclicals and pastoral letters. The liturgy is not primarily a teaching but an action: it is above all about the *gloria Dei* – the glory of God – and the *salus hominum* – the salvation of humankind –, the latter being a logical consequence of the former. The liturgy is a vital, all-encompassing expression of the Church in her universality – *the Ecclesia universalis* – even in her local form; and within the liturgy, a vital encounter takes place between God and humankind. Consequently, it is in the liturgy that the Church's activity culminates, as it were. In it, hierarchical magisterial authority, pastoral authority and priestly authority are united in a common action, together with the

of the faithful and the action of Christ and God, no.¹⁵⁹ This explains why the teaching of the faith takes on a particular form in the liturgy: the liturgy is always at the service of prayer, even in those parts that relate more directly to teaching, namely the readings and homilies. The liturgy is always and above all prayer.¹⁶⁰ Admittedly, it is also a means of religious instruction, but indirectly. This is why, owing to this particular nature of the liturgy, the truth is less grasped intellectually than experienced, and so the liturgy acts first and foremost, and more directly, on the subconscious – at least that is how it ought to be: and, as a result, its effect is deeper and therefore more lasting. The mystery of the importance of the liturgy and of the transmission of the faith that it

¹⁵⁶ See Irénée DALMAIS, Antonin-Marcel HENRY: *op. cit.* (note 42), p. 87; see Paul de CLERCK: 'Lex orandi – lex credendi' (note 131), p. 208.

¹⁵⁷ Hermann A. SCHMIDT: *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 26–27; Anton HÁNGGI: *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 447; Paul de CLERCK: 'The Liturgy as a Theological Space' (note 24), p. 133.

¹⁵⁸ Cypriano VAGAGGINI: *op. cit.* (note 76), p. 301.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 300–301.

This is due in particular to the fact that it is addressed to people of all intellectual and social backgrounds.¹⁶¹

The liturgy expresses the Church's present faith and, at the same time, reflects its development throughout history; however, it does not always engage the Magisterium in the same way; all this was recognised by the Church Fathers. However, from a dogmatic point of view, the persuasive force is not the same for everything that the Magisterium requires the faithful to believe in the liturgy; it varies from case to case. The same applies to the form and degree of assent required of the faithful.¹⁶² For example, the axiom '*lex orandi – lex credendi*' has a different meaning depending on whether it is applied to the Feast of the Assumption of the Most Holy Virgin Mary or to the diocesan feast of the translation of the House of Loreto.¹⁶³ Furthermore, many ancient liturgies contain dogmatic errors which have, in a sense, crept into them insidiously. For example, in liturgical documents from the Middle Ages, there is a rubric stating that it is sufficient to dip the consecrated host into the wine in the chalice to consecrate the wine. Similarly, in certain ancient missals, there is a Mass intended to alleviate the pains of hell.¹⁶⁴

To determine whether a liturgical statement from the past or even from the present constitutes an imperative dogmatic truth, a rigorous and in-depth theological examination must be carried out. Sometimes, the liturgy itself provides criteria for judging the dogmatic authority of a liturgical element: this may be, for example, the weight that the liturgy in general attaches to that element, or that a particular liturgy attaches to it, or indeed that all liturgies attach to it. However, it is quite often very difficult to determine, on the basis of the liturgy alone, what the true authority of a doctrinal point in the liturgy is and what authority the Magisterium attributes to that doctrinal point.¹⁶⁵

When one wishes to evaluate a particular liturgical element from a theological perspective in this way, one must first ascertain its philological meaning and place this within its historical context. One must then assess the conclusions of philological and historical criticism in the light of doctrine; in practical terms, one must ask to what extent a particular liturgical element pertains to the substance of the faith. In any case, the final conclusion certainly cannot be based on mere theological reflection. Here, as indeed with all matters relating to the faith, the supreme criterion is the Magisterium of the Church – first the ordinary Magisterium, but also, subsequently, the extraordinary Magisterium.¹⁶⁶

It must be clearly understood that the doctrinal authority attached to the various elements of the liturgy is proportionate to the authority of the members of the hierarchy who have set them forth or approved them. If incorrect expressions or manifest errors have crept into the liturgy of a particular Church and remain there for a certain time, this does not pose a particularly serious problem for the faith: it suffices to recall that the bishop, in himself, is not infallible; this allows, for example, the problem of the Mass to be resolved in order to mitigate the

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 297–298.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

the torments of hell. Individually, bishops are not infallible; however, taken as a whole, they are infallible, even in the ordinary magisterium, provided that they unanimously profess the faith of the universal Church. This is why those liturgical elements which, for a certain period, were common to all liturgies and were regarded as matters of faith are, in fact and in truth, matters of faith. This applies, amongst other things, to the approval given to the veneration of saints, relics and images; to the benefit of invoking the saints; to the practice of infant baptism; and to prayer and the offering of the sacrifice of the Mass for the dead. Generally speaking, the following can be said: once a liturgy has been approved by the Holy See, the liturgies currently in use in the Catholic Church can and must be regarded as free from error in matters of faith and in accordance with the moral norms laid down by God , no.¹⁶⁷

When the liturgy celebrates or commemorates miracles, apparitions, private revelations or other divine manifestations not contained in Holy Scripture, this does not mean that the Church thereby introduces them into the *depositum fidei*; nor does it incorporate them into the ‘sacred heritage’ of the faith; it merely affirms that devout believers may believe in these manifestations. This applies, for example, to the feast of the Apparition of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes or to the feast of the stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi .¹⁶⁸

As early as the 1980s, some people rightly wondered whether, and to what extent, the numerous liturgies in the vernacular that emerged after the Second Vatican Council – and which the Council had certainly not intended to be so numerous or so radical – could truly be regarded as a liturgy considered to be an important profession and testimony of the faith; in other words, whether, in their quest to enhance pastoral effectiveness, liturgies in the vernacular might not, here and there, blunted the precision of the truths of the faith .¹⁶⁹ One is justified in answering ‘no’ to the first question and ‘yes’ to the second .¹⁷⁰ A liturgy constituted in this way cannot alter the faith, insofar as the authority of the liturgy is always subordinate to the authority of the Magisterium.

Given the close relationship between the liturgy and the faith, it is quite evident that there is a link between, on the one hand, the profound changes brought about by the Church’s liturgical reform and, on the other hand, the breaches of dogma that are observed today throughout the Church, and the gradual disappearance of the faith, which is an indisputable fact. Psychologically speaking, this is even a certainty. The liturgical reform has shaken many people’s trust in the Church, particularly insofar as, generally speaking, this reform was not sufficiently explained to the faithful and insofar as, all too often, those responsible for the liturgy have considered—and still consider—that this reform authorises them to do whatever they please

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 302–303.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁶⁹ Walter DÜRIG: *op. cit.* (note 38), p. 236.

¹⁷⁰ One cannot agree with Josef Pascher when he asserts that vernacular languages are no less precise than Latin (cf. above, note 17). Be that as it may, within the Church, it is the Latin text of the liturgy which, today as in the past, remains the authoritative version. In this regard, one should recall the instruction **Liturgiam authenticam** (2001) of the Congregation for Divine Worship (see also note 138 above), which emphasises once again that it is the Latin texts that are authoritative. This therefore requires that vernacular translations of liturgical texts be checked against the original Latin text, which excludes translations that are more like paraphrases or that seek to resolve theological problems by deviating from the original text, for example in the case of alleged discrimination against certain groups of people (*Liturgiam authenticam*, n. 65).

in the name of subjectivism and pragmatism. This erroneous interpretation of the reform by liturgists may, in reality, be based on the doubts frequently raised regarding the internal continuity of the Church, first and foremost with regard to its form, but also concerning the substance of its proclamation – in other words, it is explained by the fact that traditional ecclesiology is frequently called into question. This is an additional source of instability, particularly at a time when the Christian faith is under attack from all sides.¹⁷¹

This is why, for many Catholics, the weakening and corruption of the faith, as well as doctrinal uncertainty, cannot objectively be attributed to the liturgy, insofar as it is the liturgy of the Church and is approved by the Church's supreme authority. This must be taken into account all the more so because, in practice and in many cases, the liturgy risks being an expression of heterodox doctrine and could well lead to dogmatic errors. This clearly highlights the very great responsibility that pastors bear today: by ensuring that the liturgy is celebrated correctly in their diocese, they ensure that doctrine is orthodox and properly proclaimed.

If one seriously accepts the principle that the liturgy is a manifestation of the faith, this implies that, in relation to other Christian denominations or other religions, there can and must be no common liturgy except to the extent that there is a communion of faith. The increasingly common practice of intercommunion and concelebration is, *de facto*, a distortion of the faith. In fact, one might even say that this practice of intercommunion and concelebration necessarily implies a faith that differs from the traditional faith. However, as such, this practice cannot under any circumstances alter the Church's current faith, as it is not legitimate, even if, for diplomatic reasons or out of weakness, the ecclesiastical authority does not oppose it.

The liturgy undoubtedly constitutes an alteration of the faith when it goes beyond liturgical prescriptions, as it all too often does at present; the celebrants who practise it in this way may not be sufficiently informed or aware of what this entails, and perhaps they are sometimes driven by an instinct to imitate, which is inversely proportional to their theological training and their level of reflection; but perhaps these excesses should also be attributed in part to pride, to the presumption of knowing better, if not even to a fundamental state of uncertainty regarding doctrine. In any case, it is certain that whilst such illegitimate liturgical practices may, in form, alter the faith of the Church, they do not alter it in substance: indeed, worship can only be regarded as the norm of the faith in so far as it is the worship of the Church – of the universal Church.

The Church's liturgy is an important *locus theologicus*, which bears witness to the Church's faith, makes it explicit and, when properly understood, is a constitutive element of that faith.¹⁷² However, even when regarded as a theological locus, the liturgy cannot be isolated from other theological loci. Above all, it must be considered in close relation to Holy Scripture, to Tradition – in both its narrow and broad senses – and to the Magisterium of the Church. The authority of the liturgy is not autonomous: it rests upon the authority of Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium. *In ordine cognoscendi*, the liturgy leads to the faith of the Church, protects it from corruption and, *idealiter*, in its continuity, it

¹⁷¹ See Wolfgang WALDSTEIN: *Hirtensorge und Liturgiereform – Eine Dokumentation*, Lichtenstein 1977, pp. 66–68, 77.

¹⁷² See above, p. 1.

preserves this faith; *in ordine essendi*, on the other hand, it presupposes faith. The liturgy is founded on the ordinary Magisterium of the Church and not on the extraordinary Magisterium; at the same time, it is the most important instrument of this vital expression of the Church. It is in the liturgy that the Church's activity culminates; it is humanity's primary and decisive response to divine Revelation; this is the source of its great value. However, whilst inherent in the liturgy, this value also stems from the fact that the liturgy is a *locus theologicus*. This is why, for those entrusted with exercising the Magisterium of the Church, the liturgy constitutes a grave responsibility.