# LITURGY IN SCHOOLS

By KEVIN DONOVAN

THIS PAPER is offered as a preliminary to the more important practical side of a workshop on liturgy in our schools. In essence it asks: When is a gimmick not a gimmick? And answers: When it works. The first section is abrief evocation of some questions and comments made by staff and students. They tend to be about the style and frequency of Mass in schools. The second section summarizes some remarks of Rahner, which seem relevant to such a discussion. The third section adds a number of important official Church documents which have a bearing on the question; the most important of these is *The directory for children's Masses* which deals with pre-adolescent children; and, for the benefit of the scrupulous, my fourth section considers the legitimacy of appealing to this document when senior pupils are concerned. Advice at this point was taken from canon lawyers on the interpretation of rubrics and possible avenues of relief from narrowness. A final section returns to the original set of questions and offers tentative conclusions.

'A catholic school has a duty to send its pupils to Mass'. When I was a boy at a jesuit school, daily Mass was an obligation under pain of a beating. Few would endorse such a policy today. But how far does the duty of a catholic school still extend in expecting attendance at Mass? Clearly we can no longer be satisfied with bare attendance or agree with the good minim, Brother Gerard, who in the sixteenth century declared that nothing was required of the faithful except to be present. What is the theology underlying such a statement or the practice of beating boys who are caught missing Mass? Only a crude version of *ex opere operato* causality could countenance such an approach. Yet is it altogether so rare? Tales are told of roll-calls being taken while boys are waiting for Mass.[1] I have certainly said Mass in one school where the head and other members of staff had to police the aisles to ensure a respectful silence. I came across an extreme case when misbehaviour at Holy Hour was punished by imposing an extra fifteen minutes before the blessed Sacrament. Let us grant that the people in authority were motivated by more than a concern for administrative convenience. We all want to hand on the faith; we all

[1] This was the practice for catholic boys at Eton as late as 1972.

recognize a responsibility for educating pupils in a deeper understanding of the Mass. How do we go about it? How often should we expect junior pupils, senior pupils or the whole school to attend Mass? How can we make the Mass itself an educative experience? Do guitars help? What becomes of reverence for the Eucharist if Mass is not celebrated in the chapel? The problems vary from school to school. In a boarding school the obligation to attend sunday Mass may pose a problem at the top of the school. How far should we respect the freedom of the act of faith and the liberty of the individual conscience? And when the school community as a whole attends should the liturgy suit the pupils or the staff? In day schools there are relations with the local parish to be thought of. Should we expect children to go to Mass on a Sunday if they have had Mass at school earlier in the week? What answer can we give when they complain that Mass in the parish is boring and are reluctant to go? What can be said to mollify the complaint that the parish priest does not sound as though he means it?

The list, though not endless, is still far from complete, but the main lines are clear enough. Beneath the details two sets of questions emerge. How often, if at all, should pupils go to Mass and with what degree of compulsion. Secondly what style of liturgy should we provide for our pupils? Most of this paper seeks to isolate certain criteria that ought perhaps to be borne in mind when making a decision. The final answer must, of course, rest with the men and women on the spot.

However difficult the questions may be, I start in this second section by examining the doctrine of *ex opere operato* as it is presented by Rahner. The way we understand this traditional teaching can have an important bearing on our practice.

> In the usual account the concept means that grace is 'conferred through the positing of the sacramental sign itself and neither the merit (holiness) of the minister nor that of the recipient is causally involved'.[2] It is explained that God has linked his grace once and for all to the making of this sign and that through this connection between sign of grace and grace signified, any objection that the sacramental *opus operatum* is being understood in a magical way *ipso facto* vanishes; all the more so as the need for inner receptiveness and for appropriation in faith of the grace conferred is not only not excluded, but is expressly taught by the Council of Trent.[3] All this is correct and at first sight quite clear.[4]

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[1] Denzinger, 849ff.

[2] Denzinger, 197ff, 819, 849.

[4] *Rahner Reader*, ed. Gerald A. McCool (London, 1975), p 282.

Once he has disposed of a magical interpretation and stressed the dispositions of the person receiving the sacraments, Rahner goes on to criticize this way of presenting the doctrine.

> But we must note that in the first place the Council teaches the necessity, if the sacrament is to be received with fruit by an adult, of a right disposition; active co-operation in the recipient with faith and love. Consequently the sacrament in its concrete reality involves, like the *opus operantis* (the disposition of the recipient) an element of uncertainty about grace, a doubt about its factual efficacy. . . . The idea of *opus operatum* in fact currently contains an element of what might be called physical certainty of functioning, which does not belong to it in a more accurate theology. . . . For the measure of grace in the sacraments is dependent on the quality of the recipient's dispositions.[5]

In the concrete situation with which we are concerned — let us say a school Mass — the subjective merit and other qualities of the minister and the dispositions of the recipient are therefore very much involved in the complex dialogue between God, Church and individual. Following St Thomas, Rahner considers that the dispositions of an individual can change during the sacramental encounter.

> It is, however, also true that the present-day theology, frequently in contrast to St Thomas, presupposes too easily, by appealing to a very questionable experience, that the dispositions do not change under the influence of the sacramental happening.[6]

The practical conclusions from the type of discussion which Rahner gives in several places throughout his scattered writings are perhaps most forcibly drawn by the american bishops' committee on the liturgy. In *The Place of Music in Eucharistic Celebrations* they have this to say: 'The manner in which the Church celebrates the liturgy has an effect on the faith of men. Good celebrations nourish and foster faith. Poor celebrations weaken and destroy faith'. They are prepared to go as far as to say that 'the primary goal of all celebration is to make a humanly attractive experience'. A sentence like this, taken in isolation, could well be misunderstood. It must be read in the context of discussions about faith and in the light of the nuance which Rahner brings to the old view of ex *opere operato*.

Another passage of Rahner is worth considering. In his book *The Celebration of the Eucharist* he addresses himself specifically to the

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[5] *Ibid.*, p 283 quoting Denzinger, 799.

[6] Rahner, K.: *Theological Investigations* II, 'Sacramental and Personal Piety' (London, 1963), p 114.

question of frequency of Mass. It is a topic he returned to more than once, and in an earlier essay he had remarked:

> If in a particular case the dispositions (which are the measure, not the cause of the sacramental effect); if the dispositions cannot actually increase any further to any marked extent either before or through the reception of the sacrament (for reasons which lie beyond the sacrament and the good will of man), then the sacrament too cannot achieve any further marked effect. Two kisses of love are not always more than one.[7]

He returns to the theme more specifically and offers a theological principle by which the question of frequency may be decided. The passage is complex even for Rahner and will have to be quoted in full.

> It has been shown (in the earlier part of the book) that by the sacrifice of the Mass an increase of God's honour and of blessing for man occurs solely in proportion as man places himself by the Mass with his faith and love under the Cross of Christ. Consequently the only relevant principle may be formulated as follows. The general conditions of physical and moral possibility being presupposed, the sacrifice of the altar is to be offered as often as, in it and by it, a greater measure of actual, personal participation in the Mass as Christ's sacrifice is attained, a greater measure than would be attained if the Mass were said less often or more often. In other words Mass must be celebrated as often as its repetition increases the *fides* and *devotio* of those taking part. . . . The increase of *fides* and *devotio* is precisely a deeper personal assimilation or willing reception of Christ's saving work. . . . Mass is to be celebrated as often, and only as often, as by means of it, those taking part can, it would reasonably seem — increase of *fides* and *devotio* — be built up into the Church.[8]

I should like to stress once again the non-automatic character of the participation and of the increase in glory given to God. The extent of both is bound up with frequency and, I would add, with the style of the celebration. And about both a pastoral judgment has to be made. Hence the importance of phrases like 'in human estimation' or 'it would reasonably seem'. In making such a judgment I submit that the people most concerned — that is the pupils themselves — ought to be consulted, particularly about the style of liturgy we offer them. Official support for this view is abundant.

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[7] *Ibid.*, p 132.

[8] Rahner, K and Haussling, A.: *The Celebration of the Eucharist* (London, 1968), pp 92, 93, 37.

> The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration depends in great measure on choosing readings, prayers and songs which correspond to the needs, spiritual preparation and attitude of the participants. This will be achieved by an intelligent use of the options which are described below. In planning the celebration the priest should consider the spiritual good of the assembly rather than his own desires. The choice of texts is to be made in consultation with the ministers and others who have a function in the celebration, including the faithful. Since a variety of options is provided it is necessary for the deacon, readers, etc., to know beforehand the texts for which they are responsible so that nothing will upset the celebration. This careful planning will help to dispose the people to take their part in the celebration.[9]

A little further on the General Instruction repeats the warning against indulging clerical preferences: 'If he celebrates with a congregation, the priest should first consider the good of the faithful and avoid his own particular tastes'.[10]

The same provisions are repeated more briefly in the new Rite of Penance.[11] A penitential celebration with teenagers (*cum juvenibus*) should be prepared in such a manner that, as far as possible, they themselves along with the celebrant choose the texts and hymns and even compose them. This is one of the few official documents that refers specifically to liturgy with young people, as opposed to ordinary parishes on the one hand, and young children on the other. However, in the opinion of reputable canon lawyers the general pastoral principles of *The Directory of Children's Masses*[12] certainly apply to older children, although the detailed application of these principles would have to be adapted to suit the different age groups. The document is too long to be quoted in full and ought to be familiar to all. A brief summary of its salient features will therefore suffice.

It begins by acknowledging our duty to those who have been baptized, but have not yet grown to full maturity of faith. No one disputes the duty; that is why we have education conferences. What does need acknowledging is that many of the pupils in our care have not yet reached our level of understanding the faith and the liturgy. Hence the need to adapt the liturgy to their level. Much of the document is taken up with practical examples. The justification which it gives for this should be carefully noted. It admits that it must

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[9] *Roman Missal*: General Instruction 313 (London, 1974).

[10] *Ibid.*, 316.

[11] *Rite of Penance*, appendix II (London, 1976).

[12] AAS, 66 (1974), 30-46; cf *Worship*, vol 48, no 6, pp 367ff.

surely be spiritually harmful for children to attend an adult form of the ligurgy for many years without fully understanding what is happening. Can we be confident that an adult liturgy which suits us is necessarily the best for our adolescent pupils? The *Directory* is insistent on the need and duty to adapt details of the liturgy — wording of prayers, place of celebration, incorporation of slides and movement — for the sake of young children. I believe that we have the duty to do the same, but in a different manner, by taking more account of the express preference of our pupils than is possible in junior or primary schools.

In this fourth section I intend to consider the concern which some people express with regard to the rubrics. I assure you that I yield to no man in meticulous observance. For this reason I again consulted my canon lawyers. At Heythrop College, where I teach, a session with the canonist is regarded as indispensable in a practical exercise on the liturgy. The substance of what they say is most illuminating; unlike us lesser mortals they argue from first principles.

What is the function of liturgical law? It is to help people to pray with the guarantee of the Church's accumulated experience. The emphasis throughout is on prayer. Hence if an individual piece of legislation is found to impede the aim of the law-giver — which is prayer — then the man on the spot should use *epikeia*, which as one canon lawyer has pointed out is not a shabby escape clause, but rather a means of discerning a deeper purpose in church discipline.[13] It is as simple as that. It can be spelled out in greater detail and for those who want to consult a fuller treatment of a question which bothers many a good priest, I mention two contrasting developments of this glorified common sense. One is Rahner's theological meditation called *Observations on the factor of the charismatic in the Church.*[14] This is not an essay on the charismatic movement or on speaking in tongues, but an endeavour to evaluate the inevitable tension between the institutional elements, for instance canon law, and the demands of the Holy Spirit, which in some cases seem to be at variance with one another. Where does obedience lie? Rahner speaks of the Church as an open system, by which he means that it is not a totalitarian system in which all the members and institutional functions are regulated by directives coming from a central point such as Rome. It is rather a system

[13] McManus, Frederick R.: 'Liturgical Law and Difficult Cases' in *Worship*, vol 48, no 6, pp 363-5, who quotes this definition of *epikeia*: 'a correction or emendation of a law which in its expression is deficient by reason of its universality, a correction made by a subject who deviates from the clear words of the law'.

[14] Rahner, K.: *Theological Investigations* XII (London, 1974), pp 81-98.

in which everything is open to an influence outside the system, namely God's Holy Spirit.

> Let us concentrate on the connections between the Church's official institutions and the charismatic element in her at the level of the christian life and the Church's life in the concrete, and recognize at this level that in this interplay within an open system of the Church the very nature of the system is such that it is quite impossible to avoid cases of conflict. . . . The very process of striking the right balance in the concrete between personal initiative and obedient fulfilment of the directives from above can no longer be clearly and unequivocally arrived at on the basis of a general principle. . . . Rather it is something that must constantly be arrived at afresh as a matter of concrete decision.[15]

For those who prefer it, there is the more down-to-earth approach of a former president of the American Canon Law Association, a professor of canon law at the Catholic University of Washington and director of the secretariat of the american bishops' committee on liturgy. His authority carries weight and I shall try to summarize him accurately rather than gloss.[16] He is anxious to help those who are conscientious in their concern for liturgical and sacramental order and who find this order incompatible with the concrete, pastoral situation in which they find themselves. For people in this dilemma he intends to explore various avenues of relief. He believes that it is possible to find unexpected flexibility and opportunities of escape from the rigid norm. After looking at the lessons to be learned from four specific areas — liturgies for children and retarded persons, confession before first communion, communion in the hand and deviations from the four authorized eucharistic prayers — he goes on to ask: How restrictive and how rigid is liturgical legislation? To answer this question and to ease the burden many of us feel, he applies some well-worn canonical principles, which must be used by anyone who wishes to embark on an intelligent application of the texts to particular situations. The first of these is an old friend from roman law: *De minimis non curat praetor*. Concern for minutiae has often been fantastic while many formal prescriptions have been neglected or disobeyed. Secondly, it is necessary to distinguish between pronouncements which affect the Church as a whole and the more casual, secondary, roman responses to a private enquiry. Some people may

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[15] *Ibid.*, pp 95-96.

[16] McManus, F. R., *op. cit.*, pp 347-66.

attach more importance to an interpretative or local instruction than they do to the decrees of the Second Vatican Council. Thirdly, rubrics are not all of the same kind: some are preceptive or formal and obligatory norms, while others are directive or non-preceptive, providing useful guidelines, but hardly part of church law. Most of the liturgical books which have appeared since 1968 contain material of high quality; the rubrics are frequently couched in declarative rather than jussive terms; they are descriptions of the best way of doing something and not necessarily normative. Fourthly, those who are faced with constraints or obstacles imposed by liturgical discipline may profitably explore the possibility of usage or custom, whose evaluation will depend on such things as the objective goodness of the practice, the stability which it enjoys, the degree of variance from the prescribed liturgical norm, the significance of the matter. McManus points out that church law is never intended to be an end in itself or the highest goal, and the workings of the Holy Spirit can be discerned in the actions and liturgical inspirations of the smallest congregations and the least members of the community. Fifthly, canon lawyers have always recognized that law can cease; a point may be reached when a given law is so far removed from the purposes, experiences or genuine situations of the church community that it is no longer a law. This process may take a long time or it may happen surprisingly quickly. Sixthly, our distinguished author points to a revolutionary turn taken by the Second Vatican Council, which is referred to as decentralization or subsidiarity. The decree *Christus Dominus* recognizes that bishops, each one for his own church, have the right to dispense the faithful for their spiritual good and, in particular cases, from the general law of the Church. Lastly, canonists and moralists have always considered the possibility of excusing individuals from observance of church law. The key to excusing clauses is the serious damage or inconvenience in proportion to the law; in other words there are those who honestly feel that there is greater harm than good in a given aspect of the law.

In this fifth and final section I want to draw a few brief conclusions and present a set of questions for further discussion.

*Conclusions*

(i) *Faith*. What we are concerned with is faith and not entertainment. We therefore have to ask ourselves whether we are building up faith and add the corollary that boredom may not necessarily mean lack of faith, but simply an unnecessarily boring liturgy.

(ii) *Teaching*. 'But surely we are here to teach?' Yes, we are here to try to deepen an understanding of Mass and the sacraments. I suggest that this is at least in part achieved through a fruitful experience of prayer and the liturgy. It is a case of learning by doing. It is akin to the traditional sacramental catechesis known as mystagogy. No doubt it needs supplementing by the formal and abstract classroom teaching of doctrine. The two activities should be seen as complementary.

(iii) *Experience*. As part of our teaching we ought to be giving pupils the experience of a range of different styles of liturgy, from the formal to the more relaxed type of small group celebration.

(iv) *Consultation*. On the basis of a growing breadth of experience we can ask our pupils which type of celebration seems most helpful. In doing this we can stimulate their own reflections and even encourage them to make a contribution to the liturgy of their own parish.

(v) *Worship of the whole man*. Another article in this *Supplement* mentions the affective gap in prayer.[17] Ours is an incarnational faith; we worship with body and soul and are not designing a liturgy for angels or computers. This was surely recognized in the medieval and baroque periods in spite of their other shortcomings. In practice this means trying to strike a balance between the earthy and the elevating, between what communicates with a particular group and what evokes the transcendence of God.

*Questions*

1. Frequency of Mass. We need to discuss it along with the allied questions of voluntary or compulsory Mass and the freedom of the act of faith.

2. Community is an issue which will arise out of the first questions. Is there a sense of community at all in our schools? And is it something that can be expressed and built up in the liturgy? Or is there a contradiction between the school life-style and the challenge of our liturgy? 'Ah, but we are a catholic school. The parents expect us to have daily Mass'. There is some force in this argument, but does it sufficiently take into account the freedom of the act of faith? And this freedom must include the freedom to reject, at least provisionally. This is a sensitive area and we should acknowledge it. What are the

[17] Hewett, William, *supra*, pp 68ff.

pupils motives when they attend Mass? Fear? Compulsion? And what are our own reasons for insisting on their attendance? Do we possess a view of the Eucharist that approximates to brushing teeth or 'potty' training? Do we respect the age and growth of our pupils in their understanding and acceptance of the faith? 'Ah', we say, 'but people's feelings are treacherous. What they don't appreciate now they will later on'. Appreciate what? And for what good reason, if they failed to appreciate it at school? Again, what of non-catholic pupils and members of staff? Do we say with Berrigan: 'Compel them in. . . .' These issues are far from easy, but it seems to me that they must be faced.

3. Who does the Eucharist exist for? To put it crudely: Them or me? Or perhaps better: *Sacramenta propter homines*. Do we recognize that there can be differences of taste and spiritual development between master and pupil, priest and adolescent? The expression of reverence can and does vary. It is, at least in part, culturally conditioned and we should acknowledge that there are cultural variations even in our own country.

4. What of individual members of staff, especially priests, who seem totally out of sympathy with the aims of Vatican II? While respecting their preferences as persons, how far do we 'let them loose' on the school? The problem of personnel (as of existing church buildings) is never far from the foreground when it comes to liturgical practice.

5. Finally, and a challenge to us all: What makes a good and fruitful celebration? What are the qualities of a good celebrant, and how do we train him?