

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 121 published 2 February 2022

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity... but Not with Catholics Attached to the Tradition?

For this letter, we're reusing verbatim the title we gave to our letter #729 (January 15, 2020); it is perfectly topical today, as an opinion piece in *La Croix* reminds us. We'll get back to that.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was created in January 1933 on the initiative of Father Paul Couturier (1881-1953), a priest from Lyon, for the unity of all baptized Christians, especially Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and the Reformed. After the Council, this Week involved the organization of common prayers, sometimes even common ceremonies. It is prepared jointly by the World Council of Churches in Geneva and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. It takes place from January 18, the date of the ancient feast of the Chair of Saint Peter in Rome, to January 25, the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul.

In 2020 we asked this simple question: are those who are faithful - for solid reasons that they have expressed many times - to the celebration of the traditional liturgy still Catholic? If they are no longer Catholic, because of the so-called paradigm shift brought about by Vatican II, or at least if they are no longer quite Catholic, i.e., if they are in "imperfect communion" according to the new terminology, then they are separate Christians, just like the Orthodox, the Anglicans, etc. And if such is the case, the same principles of understanding and charitable dialogue, together with the generous loan of religious buildings, must be applied to their pastoral care. But if they still are in perfect communion, they should all the more be treated with charity and respect, as are Eastern-rite Catholics or those who speak a minority language, who have the right to complete freedom and to all the means to celebrate divine worship to which they are accustomed.

Consistency of the part of the supporters of ecumenism!

This is why we were pleased to see that four French Catholic personalities, Dom Jean Pateau, Abbot of Notre-Dame de Fontgombault, Fr. Pierre Amar, diocesan priest, Christophe Geffroy, director of La Nef, and Gérard Leclerc, writer, used this argument and published in *La Croix* (January 19) an article under the title: "Liturgical war—'Rather than accusing each other of ideological presuppositions, what if we listened to each other?'" We have reproduced the full text of this article below.

The tone of this text may seem a bit sentimental, or even excessively irenic, considering the violence deployed in Rome today against the supporters of the traditional liturgy. The fact remains that this call to dialogue, to understanding, to fraternity, is first of all a call to coherence addressed to the partisans of ecumenism: "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity therefore poses first of all an internal question for the Catholic Church. The synodal process that is beginning invites us to go beyond verticality, severe authoritarianism and fussy legalism, which only create unbearable situations and lasting resentments."

If, therefore, one is a fervent defender of ecumenism ad extra, all the more should one be ad intra, and surround the brethren who are not separated but

different “with fraternal respect and charity,” as the conciliar decree *Unitatis redintegratio* demands.

Certainly, the opinion piece by Dom Pateau, Pierre Amar, Christophe Geffroy, and Gérard Leclerc, is addressed to ecumenists as well as to traditionalists, and it evokes the reciprocity that this attitude must have. It is correct from the point of view of charity, which must never be forgotten in any situation. However, we must distinguish the situation of the lamb from that of the wolf on the point of devouring it: it is first to the wolf that charity must be preached!

And consistency on the part of the Traditionalists...

Above all, the defenders of the traditional liturgy need to be consistent themselves. They often criticize the way in which the ecumenical process is conceived. For example, Christophe Geffroy, in an editorial in *La Nef*, December 2016, asked that ecumenism be “a dialogue in truth.”

He was reflecting on Pope Francis’ trip to Sweden to open the year celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation for Protestants, when Luther posted his 95 theses in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517.

Christophe Geffroy brought up what is called “the dialogue of life,” in which one says: “Since doctrine separates us, let’s put it aside and instead see what unites us.” He continued: “This approach can be acceptable provided that those who engage in it are aware of the reality of doctrinal differences, which then allows us to concentrate on the concrete things in life that unite us.” This is how, he specified, “the ‘joint statement’ of October 31, 2016, in Lund, by Pope Francis and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan should be read. It is indeed significant that it does not address any substantive issues (except for a couplet on intercommunion that only states that it wants to ‘move forward’) to remain at the level of generalities.”

Whereupon the director of *La Nef* affirmed: “Ecumenical dialogue is necessary, but it must be done in truth.” To do so, we must beware of “refusing reality [which] can only lead to disillusionment, and ultimately to sabotaging what we claim to be building - by building on sand and not on rock”

One can only subscribe to and apply the “ecumenical” dialogue that Christophe Geffroy advocates between Catholics in favor of the new liturgy and Catholics attached to the traditional liturgy. They must be aware, and tell each other in all sincerity, in all truth, and of course in all charity, what separates their liturgical practices. A thousand times have the traditionalists provided explanations, but a calm dialogue would allow them to explain once again that it is not for sentimental reasons that they are attached to the Tridentine Mass, but for serious doctrinal reasons. They will gladly hear their “partners” in liturgical dialogue explain that the new liturgy is more participatory. To which they will reply that the traditional liturgy includes the participation of the faithful, but that the over-participation to which the new liturgy gives way erodes the meaning of the hierarchical priesthood. They will explain, for their part, that the new Mass, which sought to replace the traditional Mass, has proceeded to considerably weaken the theology of the Eucharistic sacrifice, that of the real presence, that of the hierarchical priesthood. And so on and so forth.

And they will first ask charitably, even affectionately, that they be *ecumenically* allowed to pray according to the traditional liturgy of the Church of Rome.

Liturgical war—“Rather than accusing each other of ideological presuppositions, what if we listened to each other?”

(Opinion piece in *La Croix*, 19 January 2022; original)

On the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, four Catholic personalities call for “mutual respect” between Catholics attached to the ancient form of the liturgy and the others. They invite us to “take in hand” the brotherhood to which Christians are called.

“The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council.”^[i] These were the first words of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism. Since then, we have learned the method: dialoguing, listening to each other, valuing each other. Accepting our differences at times, not denying them. Praying together often. We have learned that ecumenism is affective before it is dogmatic or juridical. We also understood that Christian unity is vital for the very credibility of the Gospel. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:35).

Perhaps Benedict XVI had this in mind when he sought an end to the internal division among Catholics over the liturgy born of the Council. Rather than legal or dogmatic arguments, he proposed a dialogue. We should “enrich each other”. This meant putting an end to the fratricidal liturgical war that had so divided Christian communities. From now on, he asked us to listen to each other, to dialogue. Have we done so? Certainly not enough. We have sometimes lived side by side as strangers, replacing fraternal enrichment with mutual ignorance. We are paying the price today.

A form of interior war

Is it necessary to renounce this search for liturgical peace? Are we reduced to liturgical uniformity as the only means of unity? The question is more serious than it seems. For it also opens up a form of interior war. It is indispensable to be at peace with one’s past in order to move forward. If we are not able to live in peace with the previous form of the liturgy, then we are installing war at the heart of what should be the sacrament of human unity with God and with each other.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity therefore poses first of all an internal question for the Catholic Church. The synodal process that is under way invites us to go beyond verticality, severe authoritarianism and fussy legalism, which only create unbearable situations and lasting resentments.

Ideological presuppositions

What if we had a dialogue? Rather than accusing each other of ideological presuppositions, rather than attributing to the other unavowed intentions or locking him into his history, what if we listened to each other? We would discover wounded feelings and humiliated hearts on both sides. Yes, the 1960s and 1970s were sometimes marked by a politicization and radicalization of ecclesial positions (especially liturgical positions), which created tensions. Yes, both sides have inherited cultural and sociological attitudes that need to be purified in the light of the Gospel. But how can we do this? By hurling anathemas at each other: Modernists! Integrist! Maurrassians! Progressives! Will the truth come out of this? Through regulations prohibiting the publication of Mass schedules? Has such a method ever been seen to contribute to charity and unity?

On the contrary, the multiplication of prohibitions creates a fascination and a desire for transgression among the younger generations of clerics and laity alike. One should remember that the Roman condemnations of de Lubac and Congar contributed to their being read in the seminaries and did not strengthen confidence in Roman authority. Moreover, by multiplying vexatious and detailed measures against the old liturgy, one runs the risk of missing the essence of the liturgical reform as desired by the Council by enclosing it in a new juridical and authoritarian rubricism rather than by opening it up to the participation of the people of God.

Let us pray for each other

So, what if we dared to pray with each other? Certainly, everyone would have to take steps of his own. But then they would be taken out of love and not out of compulsion. Ecumenism is not a work of diplomacy and skill. It is first of all a spiritual attitude. So let us open the doors. Open them to the supporters of the ancient liturgy, when they can, out of love and not out of legal obligation, that they may dare to experience concelebration, the beautiful biblical richness of the Novus Ordo lectionaries.

It is up to the practitioners of the liturgy as renewed after the Council to let themselves be disturbed with joy by these communities that celebrate the *Vetus ordo* and that bear beautiful fruits of mission. Do we have to compete with each other? Is fraternity impossible? Who even knows if our parishes would not benefit from celebrating from time to time towards the East or from using the ancient text of the offertory?

A heart full of good will

Let us visit each other! Let's spend a Sunday in the home of someone who celebrates the same Lord with different rites than we do. Perhaps we will be offended by this or that way of doing things. But if our hearts are kind, we will discover seeds of the Word that we ourselves have forgotten.

Liturgical peace in the Church cannot be achieved as long as one side continues to cast suspicion on the Mass of the other side.

Since the Pope asks us to do so, it is up to all of us, bishops, priests and laity, to take charge of this fraternity from the bottom up rather than waiting for decrees to regulate it. The risk of unity is entrusted to us by the Pope. What if we dared to take it in hand? What if we dared to reach out to each other?

[i] Vatican II, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 1.

Accueil > À Vif

Guerre liturgique : « Plutôt que de s'accuser mutuellement de présupposés idéologiques, si nous nous écoutons ? »

tribune

Dom Jean Pateau
Abbé de Notre-Dame de Fontgombault

Abbé Pierre Amar
Prêtre diocésain

Christophe Geffroy
Directeur de La Nef

Gérard Leclerc
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TRIBUNE. À l'occasion de la Semaine de prière pour l'unité des chrétiens, quatre personnalités catholiques appellent à « l'estime mutuelle » entre les catholiques attachés à la forme ancienne de la liturgie et les autres. Ils invitent à « prendre en main » la fraternité à laquelle les chrétiens sont appelés.

Collectif, le 18/01/2022 à 14:15

Lecture en 3 min.

Dans ce dossier

Tout sur le mouvement catholique traditionaliste

Comment le pape François voit les « tradis »



Après « Traditionis custodes », l'avenir incertain des instituts traditionalistes



Guerre des rites et fin du catholicisme



Motu proprio : « La nostalgie pour le passé ne peut plus servir de modèle pastoral »

