

Chapter One: The Problem of Liturgical Performance

For Stanislavski's actor, there is an overwhelming desire to "act," to enter into staged life as if it were real life, to immerse and to swim in this staged but nonetheless real life. ⁸

In order to begin a study of liturgical performance, it is necessary to first find out where the data lie for such a study. On the one hand, we may claim that the available data lie in the liturgical texts themselves. On the other hand, we may claim that other 'outside' data are the real locus. However, if we choose data other than the given textual information, how may these data be measured? Mary Collins isolates two sources of liturgical data: 1) the liturgical texts and, 2) the "non textual and non-verbal aspects of contemporary liturgy."⁹ Her two loci are, basically, the vehicle of liturgical action (the texts) and the performance of liturgical action (what is done with the texts by the community). These loci are necessary objects of study as long as the church at liturgy is comprised of human persons.

A distinction can be drawn between the liturgical texts themselves and their performance. Moreover, this distinction is not a separation insofar as all action is both a movement and that which is moved. It is to this organic unity that we must turn in order to investigate the liturgy:

"The pertinent data, then, in contemporary liturgical study will not be found primarily in the conscious verbal domain. They are to be found in the domain of non-conscious body reactions and of internal movement in space of the worshippers themselves."¹⁰

8. C.f., Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1948), 60.

9. Collins, "Liturgical Methodology and the Cultural Evolution in the United States," 91.

10. Collins, "Liturgical Methodology and the Cultural Evolution in the United States," 99.

Should we ignore these basic data, we are caught in a great gap between what actually happens in liturgy and what theologians claim to be happening.¹¹ As we have seen, this is a problem for liturgical theology. To complicate affairs, a satisfactory methodology has yet to be worked out according to Collins.

In order to avoid false leads, let us turn to the liturgy itself, in this case the Mass, and attempt to discover what sort of activity it is in the structural sense. This means that we shall see to whom the necessary responsibility for the performance of the Mass belongs. By necessary, we mean that person(s) without whom the celebration could not occur. In establishing that responsibility, we will determine the real manner in which the Mass is to be celebrated, according to its present structure, at least, and the approach to performance, which is demanded by that structure.¹²

To demonstrate the performance structure of the Mass, we use a table showing the breakdown of the various units of the Mass. This table shows who is responsible for the commencement, sustainment and completion of each unit.¹³ The abbreviations OM and UM stand for Official Minister(s) and Unofficial Minister(s) respectively, that is priests, deacons, lectors, commentators, and the congregation. The table does not take into account local additions or deletions.

11. Peter Fink, "Towards a Liturgical Theology," in *Worship*. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1973), 602.

12. Catholic Church. and National Liturgy Office (Ottawa), *Sacramentary the Roman Missal Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*. (Ottawa: Canadian Catholic Conference, 1973).

13. The table is based on the Canadian Sacramentary, Catholic Church. and National Liturgy Office (Ottawa), *Sacramentary the Roman Missal Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*. It follows the plan of the Mass, p.415-624, and the General Instructions, p.11-66.