

Review of *Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis*
by Dr. Peter Kwasniewski, 2014 Angelico Press (\$16.95)

The reform of the liturgy as a “project” is something that has been going on for the better part of a century now. Originally, the Liturgical Movement began in the 19th century as an academic inquiry in order to promote a greater depth of understanding of, and participation in, the *mysterium* that we have received from the tradition and now encounter through the ancient liturgies of the Church. However, the “liturgical project” of the mid-20th century became a sort of model train set for the reformers - something to tinker with and create anew in one’s free time.

Perhaps this is because after the Second Vatican Council, the piecemeal distribution of what would eventually become the missal of Paul VI in 1969 led to a culture for nearly a decade wherein the Mass of the Roman Rite was written down on temporary manuscripts, only to be replaced every few months with new, improved manuscripts. In essence, “creativity” implicitly or explicitly became the model upon which liturgical action was to be performed, on the “stage” of the sanctuary for the “audience” in the pews.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger perhaps says it best when he remarks, “The result [of the post-conciliar liturgical reform] is not revival but devastation.”¹ He sees that the reform did not bring about renewal, a “rediscovery of the living heart” of the liturgy as was intended, but rather resulted in a “liturgy that has degenerated into a show, in which people try to make religion interesting with trendy antics and flippant moralizing.”²

The key point of failure for Ratzinger is that the aim of the reformers was not a “developed liturgy”, but rather a “self-made liturgy”. Remarking on the work of the professional liturgists, he says

they have stepped out of the living process of growing and becoming and gone over to making. They no longer wanted to continue the organic *becoming* and *maturing* of something that had been alive down through the centuries, and instead they replaced

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, “In Memory of Klaus Gamber”, *Theology of the Liturgy, Collected Works, vol. 11* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 536.

² Ibid.

it - according to the model of technical production - with *making*, the insipid product of the moment.³

“Development” - authentic development - is a theme which is common in Ratzinger’s work on the liturgy, and in his dialectic with others.⁴

While a thorough analysis of the post-conciliar reform perhaps cannot yet be fully carried out in this period of political tension immediately following the reform, what can be done, and is of vital importance 50 years after the Council is: 1) to examine the principles of development and reform in the liturgy, 2) to make a judgement as to whether the post-conciliar reform has been done in accordance with those principles, and 3) to observe as to whether or not the effects of reform have borne positive fruit. The excellent book by Alcuin Reid,⁵ I believe, successfully accomplishes the first, and other works have entered into the dialectic over whether or not the reform which occurred is in accord with the proper principles; however, there are very few published books which lay out the effects of liturgical reform and argue a case for the intrinsic relation between the effects and the reform *itself*.

Herein lies the real treasure of Dr. Peter Kwasniewski’s new book, *Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis*, a collection of essays on the liturgy. Following in the footsteps of the great contributors of the Liturgical Movement such as Dom Prosper Gueranger, Klaus Gamber, and Joseph Ratzinger, Kwasniewski relates to us in his new book what years of experience has given him, offering to his reader in a refreshing and insightful manner a critical commentary on the state of the liturgy and also where we are going.

To begin an inquiry from the observable effects is not a novel point of entry into any scientific inquiry. For Aquinas, the principles are first known implicitly through their effects, and so, upon encountering an effect, one proceeds to inquire as to its cause, and then with an understanding of the principles, one can make a rational judgment.

In a truly Thomistic fashion, Kwasniewski’s book does precisely this. Not failing to tackle the major issues of reform such as liturgical orientation, liturgical language, the

³ Ibid., 537-538.

⁴ See, for instance, the book which could be considered the foundation for the next wave of the liturgical movement, and which Ratzinger contributed a preface to in Alcuin Reid’s, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

⁵ Ibid.

sacredness of silence, and a revitalization of liturgical music in the Roman Rite, which to all of these subjects Kwasniewski offers a refreshing perspective, the author does not stop, but continues to delve more deeply into some aspects of liturgical reform that have previously not been given as great of emphasis. Among these topics - such as concelebration, the liturgical calendar and lectionary cycles, and the ecumenical impact - Kwasniewski questions whether *development* or *fabrication* has been at the heart of the liturgical reform.

But this is not merely a scientific inquiry for the author, whose unique perspective on the impact of the liturgical ritual upon daily life is no doubt influenced by his Benedictine spirituality, Kwasniewski being an oblate of the Monastery of St. Benedict in Norcia, Italy.

Like Klaus Gamber, whom Ratzinger refers to as the “Father” of the “new liturgical movement”, and also like Ratzinger himself for that matter, Kwasniewski is not a “liturgist” *per se* - that is, he is not an academic devoted to full time studies of ancient liturgical manuscripts and rubrics; rather, he is a husband, a father, a faithful Catholic layman, a composer, a director of sacred music, a philosopher, and a theologian. As a professor of theology and philosophy, he brings a critical eye to the subject which he expounds for his reader, and is thus able to make his observations with the appropriate distinctions, and altogether in a manner which puts together a compelling argument.

As one who has spent years directing *scholae cantorum* for the Mass, and as an accomplished composer, he brings to his book a unique perspective of being able to identify the manifold practical impediments to the simple act of “doing liturgy” which the rubrics of the Missal of Paul VI, and indeed, the new texts themselves, confront those who would endeavor to celebrate the liturgy in a manner which is worthy of God.

As a husband and father, Kwasniewski offers to his reader the rich liturgical experience which he and his family have obtained through living abroad for many years, and his intimate relationship with not only the Roman Rite, but also the various Eastern Rites, as well. With fatherly solicitude, he observes the pitfalls that he wants his children to avoid, and offers this as an admonition to us all. This unique perspective is worth the reader’s pause, for it is not merely that of an Americo-centric, sanitized experience of the Faith, but rather he presents to the reader a truly “catholic” perspective on his subject, one which is nourished by those great treasures of Christendom, of Counter-Reformation art and

architecture produced *ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*, embracing all of those spiritual and sacramental aids which formed so many great Saints in our history.

In the midst of a far-reaching “crisis”, one that has resulted in the loss of faith for so many, Kwasniewski observes that there has been a “resurgence” - a second wave, as it were - of the Church Militant, nourished by the graces of the rich sacramental life found in the tradition washing over them. This aspect of the book speaks to the sweetness of the truth, goodness, and beauty which is found in the rites we have received from the tradition. With a keen insight, Kwasniewski does not fail in his effort to impress upon the reader the necessity of this patrimony if one is to persevere in the spiritual life.

In sum, this collection of essays from Dr. Peter Kwasniewski is truly essential reading, whether you are a Catholic in the pews, a theologian, or a cleric, and a worthy contribution to the debates on the future direction of the liturgical movement.

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