

Reform of the reform secularizes the sacred

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Aug. 26, 2010 Bulletins from the Human Side

Even their advocates make the new liturgical translations sound like medicine for -- instead of the symptoms of -- a disorder that demeans the sacramental nature of Catholicism. Swallow this they urge -- like mothers forcing a spoon aquiver with spring tonic on their young -- it will be good for you. Thus *Our Sunday Visitor* reassures readers that responding "and with your spirit" is superior to "and also with you" because it literally mimics the original Latin, which, of course, is exactly what is wrong with it.

This minor footnote to the impending transition is also a fever reading of this affliction that, as with many illnesses, makes people feel sick before anybody has a name for it. The problem is illustrated by, but extends well beyond the new liturgical translations that are currently being packaged with as little concern for their contents or effects as the patent medicines that were hawked off the backs of 19th century wagons.

These new translations are signals of a widespread spiritual malaise that is a function of shorting out the connection between people's experience of life and its spiritual, or sacramental, symbolization in their religion. They are thereby denied the energy of a sacramental system to ground them in and guide them through the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (the overwhelming and enthralling mystery) of existence. While religious leaders like to blame this on secularization -- as Pope Benedict does of a Europe that leaves religion out of its official declarations -- the responsibility may lie with the same religious leaders who, out of touch or unacquainted with the mythic depth of sacramental life, cannot keep their people in touch with this vital source of their spiritual lives.

Joseph Campbell termed this massive tear in the fabric of life as "Mythic Dissociation." When this occurs we find ourselves in what poet T.S. Eliot describes as *The Waste Land*. This basic estrangement from any feeling for the mystical energy of the church as the *Sacramentum Mundi*, the mystical mirror in which the beleaguered world can see a reflection of its profound longings and strivings, can be observed in the way the sacraments are almost exclusively discussed. They are spoken of as static objects to be regulated rather than living symbols to be celebrated. Those in charge are uncomfortable speaking of sacramental depths but are endlessly preoccupied with their surfaces. How much have you heard about the Eucharist as a Mystery that symbolizes the life-death-resurrection rhythm of human existence compared to the Eucharist that must be controlled -- celebrated only by unmarried males, denied, even though it is food, to hungry Christians who are not Catholics, and, in steamy geysers of words more regular than Old Faithful, never, even if all male priests have been carried away in a heavenly chariot, to be entrusted to the ministry of women?

That the sacraments are being made static entities is also evident in the widespread rush to make, as I heard a pastor put it, "Eucharistic adoration the source of all parish life." The Kingdom of God and Jesus are not so much among you as He is there, all alone waiting for the "adorers" to keep Him company in the long drear vigils of the night. The same pastor recently rejoiced that his church had received the title, as if he were a franchisee, of "Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration Chapel." Private devotions have a revered place in church history but this theological distortion of Jesus' being in a chapel in need of visitors is a classic example of the "Mythic Dissociation" that, like the dire effects of medicines rattled off on television ads so that you can barely

hear them, is a principal side-effect of the misguided movement to find the real Jesus hiding back in the 19th century when He is everywhere in the 21st.

The Reform of the Reform is, in fact, the Waste Land in which, as Campbell observes, "the myth," -- for us, the sacramental system -- "is patterned by authority, not emergent from life, where there is no poet's eye to see, no adventure to be lived, where all is set for all and forever." The new texts, in effect, split our everyday experience of struggling to work and to love from their sacramental symbolization in the renewed liturgy of Vatican II. This "new" translation turns us back to another world in which the sacraments were dry remedies for shut-ins rather than dynamic sources of spiritual strength to participate in the world's bittersweet love affair with life in all its hazards and joys. These new texts, drafted by men more interested in controlling their circumstances than giving them away as the loaves and fishes to the hungry crowds, are the real sources of the secularism that remain largely unrecognized by the pope who is so appalled by it.

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