

Asceticism and Tradition

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In order to establish the fundamental credibility for defending the historical Roman Liturgy it would be necessary to first establish a deeper foundation onto which the larger analysis should be placed.

Liturgy would have no existence apart from man and the redemption offered him by the Incarnate Lord through the Church He founded. To assess the historical form of the Roman liturgy – indeed any Christian liturgy – what is required is an antecedent Christian anthropology: an understanding of the mystery of man in his actual condition. That condition has in itself certain aspects of being and needs of correction fundamental to the pursuit of man's supernatural destiny.

In order to evaluate the *vetus ordo* of the Roman Rite it is essential to reaffirm before anything else the absolute necessity of pursuing *virtue* in the practice of religion. In that regard we must then understand how the practice of virtue approaches the liturgy, principle font of all Christian action, and is reinforced through its embrace.

In many ways modern man asserts an independence of spirit and self-sufficiency essentially antithetical to the Christian understanding of human life and its purpose. The obsessive drive towards what is conceived as "personal freedom" has, especially since the 19th century, led to a preponderant rejection of the very Christian values on which western civilization is founded. The result has been the onslaught of *radical individualism* and the influence of this movement has certainly spilled into the Catholic Church.

In this process *truth* has increasingly been perceived as subjective and therefore unattainable. Skepticism, or the preconceived notion that there can be no objective truth, readily discards the various human disciplines required in truth's pursuit. In the wake of that, *tolerance* becomes the operative principle instead. Both the rigor of discipline and the judgments of truth are perceived as acts of *intolerance* since truth assiduously seeks to separate and discard the delusions of error.

In his 1995 book, *A New Song for the Lord*, Cardinal Ratzinger observes,

Skepticism seems to be a dictate of tolerance, and, as such true wisdom. But we should not forget here that truth and freedom are inseparable... Ignorance is dependency, slavery... Only when understanding opens up, when we begin to comprehend what is essential, do we begin to be free. ^[1]

The only valid approach to God, and therefore the only valid approach to the channels leading to God, is by recognizing the primacy of *truth* and its relationship to personal *freedom*. This primacy requires in man what the Cardinal calls the *asceticism of truth*,^[2] or the disciplined self-control of humility before the fact, allowing the higher sources of God, Revelation, Scripture, Magisterium and other vehicles of tradition their preeminence while the will and reason bend to what the sources *give* to the individual who *receives*. The Cardinal observes,

The lack of truth is the major disease of our age. ...The pain of truth...has to be accepted day in and day out. Only in truth's humble patience do we mature from the inside and become free from ourselves and for God.^[3]

Christ, Who Christians profess to be the Way, Truth, and Life, calls us to an imitation of Himself. According to Cardinal Ratzinger this call is, "concerned not simply with a human agenda or with the human virtues of Jesus, but with His entire *way*".^[4]

The Cardinal is quick to point out that the authentic manner of following the Lord is not merely a "narrow moralism" viewing life from the negative side nor an "exalted moralism for heroic souls determined to be martyrs", but rather,

Jesus' call can only be comprehended from the broad paschal context of the entire exodus, which goes "through the curtain." From this goal the age-old wisdom of humans acquires its meaning – that only they who lose themselves find themselves, and only those who give life receive life (cf. Mark 8:35). ^[5]

This "exodus" or passage "through the curtain" is none other than the authentic entrance into the life of grace – the reception of God's Kingdom come upon us. It is the embrace and imitation of Christ *as He is* with all His power, by man *as he is* with all his limitation. By the penetration of the former into the life of the latter, one can come to know the power and experience of Jesus' Paschal mystery. *That* is nothing less than the personal experience of sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus to the end of sharing in His glory. The process has concomitant benefits in this life, being the Kingdom of God come upon us in the present world, the only true haven for human society.

In this reality there can be no question of the *imposition from our side* of another agenda onto what is already willed for man by God in Christ. Nor can man reduce God's will by truncating the imitation of the Son to limited terms of moral conduct alone. The mystery of following Christ is integral: it is to follow and embrace God and His will for us as something *given by Him as He is* and *received by us as we are*. This is no simple tautology: it is to articulate the truth that God is first and independent, sovereign, perfect and all knowing, while man is secondary and dependent, imperfect and ignorant.

The mystery of true human freedom lies in the right understanding of man's limitations and knowing that Christ alone can truly set us free. Such freedom is accessible to man in his actual condition only by a free cooperation with grace. This, of its very nature, requires embracing truth as sovereign, entering into the humility of self-abnegation, or, in short, passing through death in order to receive new life. The self-abnegation of Christian humility is not some expression of a darkened psyche, but rather an unleashing of the *power of Christ to transform* which is infused into this world when His death and resurrection are embraced. Cardinal Ratzinger writes that this power of transformation is found in the hope of the Church, as evident in "asceticism, humility, penance; the natural and supernatural virtues; also the great basic ministries, *martyria, diakonia, and leitourgia*." ^[6]

To understand the true nature of liturgy, Christians first need to discover anew the doctrine of original sin. In so doing there will be reestablished the supernatural reason and motives for embracing the death of Christ and concomitant practice of ascetic virtues. Then will reemerge a right grasp of the power and *divine purpose* of Jesus' atoning sacrifice and how *it* is the font of all grace. The asceticism of the Son is His obedience to the Father; the blood of His sacrifice becomes our source and power for new life effacing original sin and its consequences. As such, this constitutes one of the four principle ends of the Eucharistic liturgy.

To draw true benefit by participation in the eucharistic liturgy it is essential that the individual within his ecclesial context willingly embrace, enter into, and share *personally* in the death of Christ. In *A New Song For the Lord*, Cardinal Ratzinger quotes a passage by St. Basil summing admirably the whole Patristic tradition in this regard:

"The plan of God and our Redeemer for human beings consists in calling them back from exile and bringing them back from the alienation which came about because of disobedience... For the perfection of life is necessary to imitate Christ, not only in terms of meekness, humility, and patience imitated in His *life*, but also in terms of His *death*... How do we achieve a similarity to His death? ...What is to be won by this emulation? First of all, it is necessary to break through the form of our past life. According to the words of the Lord

this is not possible if one is not reborn (cf. John 3:3). For rebirth is... the beginning of a second life. To begin a second life, however, one must put an end to the first." [emphasis in citation] [\[1\]](#)

This second life, of course, is never to be understood as a destruction of the natural life of man but rather a cooperative *conversio ad Deum* through which human life is elevated from sin and its effects to the supernatural reality for which man has been created. This *conversio* is the corrective of life turned around: a new life begun in God, sin confessed, self-restraint engaged, weakness mastered, heaven pursued. It is made possible by the mystery of the Cross actually entering into personal human experience by cooperation with antecedent grace. All this is, quite simply, part of that *truth* which Christ *is*. Integral to the process is that it is the *true Christ alone* that sets man free, not some other. Any "freedom" that suggests its rewards will come without self-death in Christ is that ignorance leading to slavery of which the Cardinal speaks having inevitable, predictable consequences for the individual, family and society. Unfortunately such ignorance is everywhere evident in the world – and rampant in liberal Catholic thought – today.

In the many chimeric paths to "freedom" now found everywhere, the necessary path of the "asceticism of the truth," namely sincere self-examination, self-correction, self-mastery, and penance as both physical mortification and spiritual reparation, is replaced almost entirely by an aggressive self-indulgence hiding under the sobriquet *self-fulfillment*.

As a prominent illustration one need only recall the deep social unrest fomented everywhere in western societies in the late 1960s. Emanating from the moral disenfranchisement of the intellectual elite in many prominent universities and social institutions at the time, there emerged a particularly agitated global social movement colored by quasi-religious overtones bordering on social revolution. It espoused apparently noble concerns of justice for the downtrodden. The apparent good these aspirations reached for was – and remains – preconditioned by the philosophic principles actually operative in many of their advocates.

The prominent American political scholar, Dr. Robert H. Bork, a Protestant, in his 1996 book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and America*, perceptively describes the genesis and inexorable direction of western society today. It is overwhelmingly dominated by freedom movements driven by the now universal phenomenon of morally and spiritually disenfranchised radical individualism. The massive social unrest unleashed in the 1960's and early 1970's was deeply rooted in this all too familiar pattern of human behavior.

In the latter half of the present century a very old error has reemerged everywhere, the more insidious because it is largely unperceived. It has come revamped in modern language and expression, but it remains what it is: man is the source of his own salvation. Radical individualism is little more than a new incarnation of Pelagianism, evincing the notion that man is the source of his own salvation and that he can obtain "justice" if he just apply himself. The modern concomitant to this old heresy is that in the process man will be "fulfilled" and grow in "self-esteem": in his efforts to better the world, he will better himself.

If Cardinal Ratzinger rightly says that true faith in Christ can only come again through the "asceticism of truth," it is obvious that the weakening of faith and practice derives from error and self-indulgence. In the 20th century world of ever advancing communications, opinion is formed and driven by those who control the media. The social unrest of the 1960's and 1970's was engendered particularly by what Dr. Bork describes as a "pseudo-intellectual elite" found in superabundance in middle social institutions, particularly universities, and later spread deeply into the American judicial system. Pseudo-intellectuals

are those who are possessed firstly by intellectual pride, secondly by the error that pride opens itself onto, and thirdly by the unwillingness to bend conviction and personal conformity to that which truth demands. Be all that as it may, this phenomenon drives the media in society at large:

Intellectuals may be intellectually negligible, but they are an important cultural force nonetheless. Because they wield the power of language and symbols, their values and ideas are broadcast by press, movies, television, universities, primary and secondary schools, books and magazines, philanthropies, foundations, and many churches. Thus, intellectuals are influential out of all proportion to their numbers. Worse, it may be that their leftist political and cultural attitudes are permanent, beyond the reach of rational argument. ^[8]

The resultant social problem is seriously malignant because the intellectual elite is not driven by the truth of "rational argument," let alone revelation, but by an aggressive ignorance and concomitant slavery of error. At the root of it all is the virulent liberalism condemned over and over again by the Magisterium, particularly that of the 19th century papacy. These condemnations spell out with remarkable accuracy the effects of liberalism's error, its principles of private judgment, independence from God and obedience to any law higher than the individual, all of which serves to undermine Christian faith and practice, and its inevitable effects on human society at large.

These are the very condemnations decried by the University of Notre Dame's Professor White in his book, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today*, when he makes the biased remark that liturgical change was held back by "two of the most reactionary of Popes, Gregory XVI...and Pius IX, who issued the Syllabus of Errors in 1864 condemning a wide swath of "progress, liberalism, and modern civilization"."

According to White, Pope John XXIII "threw open the door to the modern world". The professor neatly passes over the contents of the opening speech given by that same Pope to the newly assembled Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. Pope John made clear his intention that, The Twenty-first Ecumenical Council, which will draw upon the effective and important wealth of juridical, liturgical, apostolic, and administrative experiences, wishes to transmit the doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion, which throughout twenty centuries...has become the common patrimony of men. ...from the renewed, serene, and tranquil adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness as it still shines forth in the Acts of the Council of Trent and First Vatican Council, the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine...^[9]

This can hardly be understood as "throwing the doors open to the modern world" as Professor White implies, since Pope John XXIII's *expressed intention* was that through whatever the Second Vatican Council would do *the common patrimony of twenty centuries of received Catholic Christianity was to "shine forth" even more clearly, "without attenuation or distortion", "in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine."* That patrimony is none other than *tradition* in its fullest, ecclesial sense, and comprises a very articulate condemnation of error including that of reckless human pride wishing to throw off the shackles of right reason applied to human weakness in the intellectual process. Even less does it indicate dismissing the ancient traditions of western cult almost without notice or reference to its historic development as a means for its "restoration". In every case the "asceticism of truth" requires the *humility of obedience* and the corrective of moral virtues to the irregularity of fallen nature. Furthermore, there is no doubt that lower movements of the flesh effect the ability to will and think according to right reason. Moral virtues are the necessary first substrate for any Christian action whatsoever.

It is certainly logical that after Vatican II the teachings of Catholicism against the dangers of liberalism were meant to remain standing intact and that fundamental principles of faith and practice were to remain operative as well. It is difficult to see how the dogmatic "acts of Trent and Vatican I" are upheld when they are attacked or that a deeper penetration of the Christian tradition is manifest in the ever-increasing eclipse of religious language or practice that publicly, palpably and perceptibly pursues the virtue and *practice* of humility, obedience, mortification and self-denial. Though these are scarcely ever mentioned any longer they will always remain integral parts of *martyrdom's devotion* – the apostolic, patristic heritage of faith which substitutes *asceticism* for physical imitation of the death of Christ. Asceticism is *required* and not merely counseled by apostolic faith.

There is little wonder in Pope John Paul's refrain that the Second Vatican Council still needs to be discovered in its authenticity. It is not unreasonable to say that in many ways the intention and implementation of the Council has been hijacked and replaced by an agenda other than the one intended by the majority of the Fathers. The spirit, called the anti-spirit of the Council" was, as Cardinal Ratzinger has remarked, evident on the floor of the Council in its deliberations.

This subject, far from being a digression from the present study, is fundamental to the whole. The very liberalism constantly condemned by the Church lies openly at the heart of the rejection of Christian values in the modern world. It is radically responsible for the disenfranchisement of whole generations of youth whose lives, distracted by materialism, are simultaneously dispossessed of principles of self-denial and any supernatural awareness.

By continuous exposure to the vast array of social communication young and old alike are led more and more deeply into principles of false liberty and increasingly entrenched in slavery to its ignorance and sin. As a constantly growing social phenomenon, this, in turn, corrupts society more and more as a whole. The process is engendered by a pseudo-intellectual elite now in control of most of the media and wielding enormous political power. This elite is constant in its on-going development and implication of presenting "freedom" as the individual divorced from objective truth and self-restraint, and disavowing the virtue of obedience as an encroachment on personal liberty.

That, in point of fact, this elite is not yet representative of the general opinion of the majority violates its own expression of enthusiasm for "democratic process". It is, however, in control, at least in the United States and similar societies, in key educational, ecclesial, and judicial institutions. The whole is a vicious circle: self-realizing, self-expanding social phenomenon, anti-Christian and Pelagian in nature, it attacks the dignity of man, his society, and his every institution.

In order to counter this attack against the foundation of human civilization, because of its preeminent place in the world, the Catholic Church needs to rediscover its authentic ascetic tradition and promote its principles and practice. It needs to reaffirm in liturgy and legislation, principle and practice, the spiritual substrate of *martyrdom's devotion*, that sharing in the self-sacrificing Christ.

The power of the cross, and all that it represents, is so real and effective that it once brought down the whole of the pagan Roman Empire and built a Christian civilization in its place. The *truth* of asceticism is uniformly interwoven into the witness of all Sacred Scripture, Christian history, and *every* historical liturgical tradition. The realization of this patrimony would certainly be part of Pope John XXIII's wish that the Church's authentic tradition "shine forth" clearly to the present world "without attenuation or distortion." The destruction of the liturgy dimension of that patrimony – which is what has, in point of fact, taken place – is an obvious violation of the Council's explicit purpose.

Apparent humanitarian concerns often mask the selfishness of libertarianism. In the 1960's and 1970's the students, and liberalized society in their wake, often vocalized broad demands for peace, justice, freedom and rights for the downtrodden. But underlying the stated concerns was an erosion and outright attack on the authentic Judeo-Christian values carrying the same names. The *authentic* values are the very foundation of western civilization. Bork cogently describes what happened to the youth of America clearly lacking in the practice of authentic religious principles of self-knowledge and self-abnegation. These were, however, the children of parents who themselves held these values, having self-sacrificed so that their children would not have to suffer the wants that the parents had known while growing up:

The absence of economic pressure and the assumption that there would never be want in the future led the young to boredom. Life stretched before them as a wasteland of suburbia and consumerism. One young idiot later said that "hell is growing up in Scarsdale." Boredom is a much under-rated emotion. The young, especially the very intelligent and very vigorous, who have not yet found a path in life, are particularly susceptible to boredom's relentless ache. It is an emotion that is dangerous for individuals and for society because a lot of the cures are anti-social: alcohol, narcotics, cruelty, pornography, violence, zealotry in a political cause. Many of the Sixties generation shopped that list. The rhetoric of revolution, was, as Peter Berger said, "not so much motivated by sympathy with black people in slums and yellow people in rice paddies as by boredom with Connecticut". [\[10\]](#)

It is quite unlikely that the Protestant American political scholar Robert Bork has been influenced by the thinking of the Roman Catholic theologian, Cardinal Ratzinger. The concurrence of their thinking clearly demonstrates from very different vantage points the same reality. Cardinal Ratzinger on this subject:

Strangely enough, people from the dominant nations are in no way happy with their type of freedom and power; they feel that they are dependent on anonymous structures that take their breath away – and this even in those places where the form of government assures the greatest possible freedom. Paradoxically, the cry for liberation, for a new exodus into the land of true freedom, sounds particularly loudly among those who have more possessions and mobility at their disposal than we could ever have imagined before. [\[11\]](#)

Why do people take refuge in drugs? ...because the life that presents itself to them is in reality too shallow, too deficient, too empty. After all the pleasures, all the emancipations, and all the hopes they have pinned to it, there remains a "much-too-little"... [\[12\]](#)

What both describe is a reality that has overrun the west and every society it influences. With boredom emergent from an affluence devoid of true spiritual values in combination with the drives of human nature and psychology (especially among the naturally bright and vigorous), western society has seen emerge a philosophy promising an elusive social salvation. This no longer involves God or the necessity of self-denial. It comes cloaked under the guise of freedom movements and their various degenerate offspring. They all encompass a philosophy wherein the *individual* sets his own standard *not* God, the Church, nor civil authority, and wherein the *individual* passes judgment as to whether he has fulfilled it – again, *not* God, the Church, nor civil authority. Its end is freedom for the unfree. It is an aggressive form of self-salvation and one that produces the emptiness it contains. Cardinal Ratzinger says as much:

Redemption is replaced by liberation in the modern sense, which can be understood in a more psychological-individual or political-collective way and which people like to connect with the myth of progress. [\[13\]](#)

What the Cardinal identifies as *psychological-individual*, Bork identifies as *radical individualism*; Ratzinger's *political-collective* Bork calls *radical egalitarianism*. As

socio-political principles these are at complete odds with one another. As Bork amply demonstrates in his book, though they are at radical odds the modern demand for perfect *independence for one and all* and perfect democratic *equality among one and all* are the incoherent operatives which completely dominate western society today. Needless to say self-denial plays little role in the former and only emerges as a certain kind of utilitarian good for the community in the other.

This influence has found its way into the Catholic Church under forms subtler than those of the civil unrest of the 1960s and 1970s but no less radical. In a recent article by Professor James Hitchcock in the *Catholic Dossier* he states:

In the pre-conciliar period the priestly vocation was always presented as sacrificial, albeit as a sacrifice which brought deeper and more satisfying rewards... vocation appeals always emphasized the spirit of self-denial expected of the priest, and many communities, such as cloistered monks and foreign missionaries, attracted vocations by offering almost nothing but a life of self-sacrifice...^[14]

This self-sacrifice is not an end in itself but an intrinsic part of that losing of one's life to the end of gaining a higher one. It is integral to sharing in the death of Christ so as to share His glory in heaven. Far from being destructive of human nature, it is the fundamental way of entering into the joy which is Christ: Unless a man lose his life, he cannot gain it. Dying to oneself is not a morbid self-loathing overturning personal fulfillment and self-esteem. Even less is it a "negative theology" to be discarded in favor of a more "enlightened" one. It is the exclusive key for entering into the joy of things spiritual. Asceticism is a fundamental and integral substrate to *Christian joy*, and as such, when it disappears, much more falls with its loss. Professor Hitchcock continues in the same article:

Towards the end of the Council this emphasis [on ascetic principles] suddenly changed. Nothing in the conciliar documents themselves supported this change, but through a variety of means Catholics were persuaded that the real message of the Council was one of release – Catholics were now being allowed to do things they were formally not allowed to do (eat meat on Friday). Struggling to make sense of subtle and difficult theological ideas emanating from Rome, it was easy to subsume all of them under the notion that the Church was now in effect telling its people to cease being sacrificial and to concentrate instead on fulfilling themselves.^[15]

This is an example of how the so-called "spirit of Vatican II" (its anti-spirit) came to insinuate itself between the stated intention of Pope John XXIII (tradition, history, the received Catholic patrimony, the acts of Trent and Vatican I "shining forth with every greater clarity") and a weakening of discipline by casting off self-restraint and sacrifice as protected and fostered by the liturgy and canon law. This falsification of ascetic principle and its exteriorization through the practice of self-effacement, fasting and penance in the life of the Church was, and remains, rooted in a *lack of humility* that applies itself in subtle or open dissent from all forms of tradition, the Magisterium and a general misunderstanding or outright hostility to the ascetic foundation of traditional Catholicism. This cannot be described by any other term than *radical* since it touches the very *root* of the imitation of Christ, the foundation of Christian life.

One of the spectacular evil fruits of this abrupt change in practice is the enormous numbers of defections from the priesthood and consecrated life, the significant decline in vocations and the marked polarity between the vocabulary and practice of self-denial before the Council and what has followed since. Its shadow may be seen in the post-conciliar popularity of the most conservative congregations stressing tradition and the practice of ascetic mortification as fundamental to the priestly vocation, when liberalized institutions have either suffered deep decline or disappeared completely.

The loss of respect, and hence deep reduction in practice, of this fundamental means of imitating Christ has also been deeply institutionalized in the Catholic Church. This is evident in the changes in the Roman liturgy and canon law. A glance at the new code of canon law reveals the startling reduction in fasting obligations from what had preceded it. That in turn, given human nature and the whole ratio for *law* in light of that same fallen nature, has resulted in the near disappearance of a practiced asceticism among Catholics at large. This tendency is in direct contradiction to the consistent witness of the Old and New Testaments, and the whole of received Catholic tradition and practice, in both the east and west.

Peritus to the Bishop of Lugano, involved in the work of the Central Preparatory Commission and all phases of the Second Vatican Council, Professor Romano Amerio, in his book *Iota Unum: A Study of Changes in the Catholic Church in the Twentieth Century*, analyzes the change in pre- and post-Conciliar positions and attitudes concerning penance and asceticism:

Relaxation of penitential practices has now been based on the presupposition that the faithful now have a more mature ascetic sense, and on the desire to spiritualize and refine the sorts of mortifications involved. The presupposition is at odds with the facts. Christian populations today are generally immersed in an abundance of sensory pleasures and worldly satisfactions; while even those who are not are on the road to the same state of abundance. The fact is that the Church's lessening of corporal privations, ostensibly in order to increase interior denial, has led to an almost total disappearance of fasting from the ordinary life of Christian people... The demise of laws in this matter has meant the overthrow of the value of obedience and the substitution of its opposite...^[16]

Amerio continues in this text, stating that the *ratio* given for the change in Church law and practice is that when the time, place and manner of penance is left to *personal free choice*, it then becomes more meritorious. This is a sophism as the theologian goes on to explain:

Three values are lost in this new teaching. First, the value of doing what penance requires from a motive of obedience to the Church, and through using the means the Church lays down. Second, the value that comes from performing a penitential act ecclesially in the way described in the traditional liturgy, leaving it to the Church to decide on the way the substance of the duty will be performed, rather than doing something individually. Third, the value of giving up one's own will as to the form of the penance; that self-abnegation [is] itself a penance. These values, all of which depend on the fact that the will is bound to observe certain customs and times as laid down, are no longer appreciated as they were... Times of corporal penance are thus left to the free choice of individual believers, and the fixed and sacred character of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday ceases to be the immovable thing it had seemed to be... The idea that abstinence can be replaced by works of mercy undermines the notion of...penance, ...[and this] has been institutionalized...^[17]

The sophism Amerio has analyzed encourages a false value regarding the Christian understanding of human freedom: it dispenses with the virtue of humble obedience as a submission to God and the channels through which His law is manifest; as submission to *other* than one's own will. This sophism insinuates that obedience to law is an infringement on personal liberty which just laws protect and foster. To overthrow the principle of obedience is to overthrow the necessary practical and operative foundation involved in *truly following Christ Whose atoning sacrifice is empowered because it is a wholly self-sacrificing obedience to the Father*. What is more, the concept that law violates freedom vitiates law as a fundamental constitutive in all human government.

Ascetic principle demands that the whole of the human person be controlled by the requirements of right reason in view of man's supernatural end. This is the law of *truth*. Penance, as understood by the new definition Professor Amerio discusses, has recently shifted from being 1) a submission of one's will to the law of God in virtue of His

independent sovereignty over man, and 2) the individual's corporal mortification as a disciplined *castigatio carnis* for training unruly flesh and *reparatio justitiae* united to the atoning sacrifice of the Redeemer for sin committed, to: anything at all *so long as it is freely chosen by the one doing it*, and therefore involving neither humility nor obedience as its precondition. "Penance" deriving from pride is not penance in any sense at all and certainly has no merit in the eyes of God.

Every spiritual author and director knows that the ascetic virtue of penance derives from obedience to another's will, not one's own, and that the internal submission of the will is externally manifest in *outward obedience* and *physical discipline* as corrective to the unruliness of fallen nature. In the received understanding, for example, of Lenten self-denial, *three* kinds of works have been historically undertaken: penance, prayer and almsgiving, based on the words of Christ. St. Augustine explains that these works represent benevolence, the desire for God and the control of concupiscence.^[18] Though each manifest a kind of self-denial, they are not the same. *Penance*, as such, includes *physical mortification of the flesh*.

To quote Amerio, "once the concept of penance is lost, everything becomes a penance"^[19]. The peritus goes on to develop the thought:

Insistence on non-bodily penance is not actually possible, because proud thoughts can hardly be got rid of without any external humbling, or irregular sensual desires without restraining the actions of the exterior senses, or the desire to overeat by cutting down on both extravagant and ordinary eating...^[20]

And:

It is the principle of obedience that gives bodily fasting its importance, and that principle has been deprived of its force by the reform in the laws of penance through the reduction in the long periods during which abstinence had to be practiced to a mere two days, and through leaving of all other penance to the supposedly enlightened and mature judgment of the faithful...^[21]

Individuals are left to their private judgment, with liberty being valued above the law. In replying to an objection Saint Thomas says [II, II, q. 147, a. 3 *ad 3.*] that fasts were "not contrary to the liberty of the faithful, but serve instead to impede the slavery of sin".^[22]

The adulation of liberty has become commonplace in post-conciliar theology... [the Professor cites an example given by a priest in a Catholic journal:] "It is simply a matter of a law that derives its justification and its moral value from the free will of the person who chooses to observe it in spirit, since the letter of it is easily gotten around." [Amerio continues:] A priest here suggests a false understanding of the moral law to a readership of half a million. A man's actions receive their value from their conformity to the law, whereas the value of the law is here being derived from the free act of the man who obeys it. There is a double sophistry involved: first, that the will ought to reject any external law, that is the dependent ought to be independent; second, that the individual Christian ought to disassociate himself from the bulk of the Church, which is the collective mystical body of Christ, and set himself up as a law unto himself.^[23]

It is in such a context that the reduction of the fasting obligations laid down in canon law and liberalization of the concept of fasting itself has eroded the very sense of the term and widely undermined the practice. Professor Amerio analyzes this change:

The reform of the rules about fasting actually seems to change the nature of the restriction by removing the element of an afflicting of the flesh that was previously admitted, even in the liturgy, and leaving only the element of moral conduct. But penance involves not merely abstaining from sumptuous eating but cutting down on ordinary sobriety, with a double view: to strengthen the mind's failing moral energies in its struggle with the law of

its members [Rom 7:23] and to expiate the faults that even good people fall into because of inherited weakness.^[24]

Professor Amerio discusses a phenomenon that is exceptionally widespread among the faithful *and* the clergy: the liberalization of the received understanding of man's relationship to God in the light of his fallen nature and the irreducible necessity of law in helping him towards his supernatural end. This vitiation of the need for obedience to law hides under a sophistic exaggeration of individual freedom. The evident collapse in humility and its subsequent obedience, and the attendant evaporation of the once widespread practice of physical self-denial in the Church, is at variance with the witness of Sacred Scripture and the received liturgical texts, themselves rooted in, causing, and being the effect of the Church's twenty centuries of faith and practice.

The relaxation in discipline has produced two effects in the peritus' judgment:

One was verbal. The meaning of the word "fast" has changed from going without food for a significant period, so that one had an empty stomach, to meaning merely not eating even if only for a few minutes. Thus in the new sense one can eat one's fill and then be fasting, and as such go to Holy Communion.^[25]

A pertinent illustration of this point, and its relationship to the undermining of the moral and spiritual value of law and penance, may be seen in the recent, controversial pastoral letter of Roger Cardinal Mahony to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, California. In the liturgical vision for the future proposed by the Cardinal for his faithful, the following description is given of an ideal Sunday parish Mass in the year 2000, subtitled, "Entrance of the Assembly":

In houses and apartments all through the neighborhood, the true entrance procession of this Mass has been in full swing, sometimes calm, sometimes hectic. Sunday clothes are being put on. Many families are finishing breakfast, conscious of the one hour fast. Here and there are adults who choose to fast altogether until taking holy communion...^[26]

A detailed analysis of this text appears in footnote 26. It is sufficient to mention here that the Cardinal's concept of fasting illustrates Amerio's remark that now one may receive Holy Communion on a full stomach and that this is a form of "fasting". Even more serious is the corollary. A new liturgical formula needs to be crafted that fits the change in practice instead of the received practice deriving from the received liturgy and tradition from which both have developed. Amerio discusses this point:

The second effect has been to falsify the liturgy, that is to deprive the liturgical formulas of their truth so that they now say the reverse of what the Church actually practices...

He continues by citing some examples of how the received liturgical texts became problematic – they said one thing while the Church has moved on to doing another:

The problem of these falsified texts [rendered so because they no longer reflect what is actually being done by the Christian people] at odds as they are with the Church's new practice was solved by changing the texts themselves, so that while remnants of the old system can still be found in them, the general inspiration comes from the modernized views on penance and conforms to the modern world's distaste for mortification."^[27]

The new orientation of exaggerated freedom is not consonant with the received tradition of the Church, but rather represents an *erosion* of fundamental truths and practices necessary to the pursuit of the Christian religion and authentic Christian spirituality. These truths and practices are connexes of the doctrine of original sin: because of its effects, the new man born in Christ must acquire, with the help of grace, first, the virtue of *humility* in his will, and then the wider virtue of *temperance* in the flesh which strengthens the will in its regard. In the exercise of both there must be a submission to something *other than self*. There must be a genuine submission to God in Christ whereby

the individual *imitates His virtues and joins his sacrifices to the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus' passion and death*. This is done ecclesially by obedience to tradition, and *that* (tradition in its fullest sense) is the very *foundation* for law in the Catholic Church. To alter the liturgy to reinforce an erosion of faith is counterproductive to the received purposes of public worship.

Ascetic obedience, a necessary concomitant to charity, brings one to experience the full, Christological, sense of new life in the Lord. Both elements of self-denial (humility and temperance) are repugnant to modern man, who has in recent years, on the widest scale imaginable since the collapse of the Rome Empire under the moral power of Christian asceticism, developed startling "new values" catering to radical autonomy, sensual gratification, and a culture of death.^[28]

What is highly significant is that textual reference to ascetic self-control has been significantly reduced in the reformed liturgy of the Roman Rite. The reasons given for altering the *received* texts is, in the words of their principle authors, to reflect "new human values." The liturgy, now instead of being *theologia prima* or the font *ex quo* Christian faith and practice is experienced and drawn, is deemed – beginning in the 1960s – a font *ad quem* these "new human values" are to be imposed. With every nuance taken into account and the most generous interpretation attributed to the redactors, this process is a radical departure from the norms of liturgical development and precisely why Cardinal Ratzinger has said so publicly, calling much of the reform hasty and artificial. It is also why he stated in *La Mia Vita* (1998) that, "I am convinced that the ecclesial crisis in which we find ourselves today depends in great part on the collapse of the liturgy..."^[29]

Fr. Carlo Braga, assistant to Fr. Annibale Bugnini in the *Consilium* (the commission responsible for the reforms in the liturgy) made the following revealing statement in *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 1970, page 419:

Revising the pre-existing text becomes more delicate when faced with the need to update content or language, and when all this affects not only form, but also doctrinal reality. This [revision] is called for in the light of new human values, considered in relation to and as a way to supernatural goods. ...ecumenical requirements dictated appropriate revisions in language. Expressions recalling positions or struggles of the past are no longer in harmony with the Church's new positions. An entirely new foundation of eucharistic theology has superseded devotional points of view or a particular way of venerating and invoking the saints. Retouching the text, moreover, was deemed necessary to bring to light new values and new perspectives.^[30]

If, in the words of Pope John XXIII, the received patrimony of faith and practice of twenty centuries, and the acts of Trent and Vatican I are to "shine forth" with even greater clarity and without "attenuation or distortion", it is most difficult to square the *reason given by Fr. Braga* and the many "retouchings" (especially the omissions) made in overhauling the received liturgical texts with *the Council's set purpose*.

If the dogmatic canons of the Council of Trent are to remain intact then there is *certainly* no "entirely new foundation of eucharistic theology" in the Church's authentic teaching that supersedes anything. If, in this case alone, insights into the eucharistic mystery have been gained, it is precisely because they are *not* new, but rather *old* truths and found within the historical contents of a faith that cannot change. These insights will then easily blend with the received liturgical texts because they will flow from the amazing Scriptural, Patristic, doctrinal richness they contain, and divine origin from which they all derive.

That same divine faith and source is the one to which all authentic ecumenical discussion must direct itself, Peter being the sign, cause, and guardian of Christian unity. The Church, therefore, does *not* have "new positions" on anything that is doctrinal, try as some may to

deconstruct a number of dogmas (which are well imbedded in liturgical tradition) in view of *transient* ecumenical concerns.

The effort to change the law of praying in order to introduce different understandings of the faith is found nowhere in Christian history except among heresiarchs seeking to change the Catholic faith that public prayer induces. This is exactly why Protestant reformers changed the Catholic liturgy, and this is why many Catholics have been deeply disturbed at the liturgical reform. The incessant and insistent need to change the received texts and liturgical culture arises either from an ignorance of it, or ill will in its regard. In either case the end result is the same: error, confusion, and erosion of faith and practice.

In his book *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent To Today*, Professor White states quite baldly that,

One cannot deny that the second liturgical movement adopted essentially a Protestant agenda for worship. ...the second liturgical movement caught fire in primarily those countries like the United States and Germany where there was a large Protestant majority. ...The leaders often had close Protestant contacts. Even though the movement had shed its skin of being a monastic fad, it was still suspect in many quarters. Not the least objection was that so many of the things being advocated sounded definitely Protestant and were in common practice [in the Protestant church] right down the street [from the Catholic church] in every American town. Nevertheless the conspirators [sic] persevered... [with the 1958 formation of a Bishops' Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate:] The church's [sic] most important activity was finally to be bureaucratized on a national level.[\[31\]](#)

Since this professor of liturgics and popular author has said that the liturgical reform actually in place adopted "essentially" a Protestant agenda for worship it would do well to recall that *essence* refer to *nature*, or the *ontological first principle* in a thing's being. Protestantism has, as its first principle, that same notion of independence, liberty, and private judgment found throughout all of society today. Therefore an "essentially Protestant agenda for worship" is underpinned by the same principle as modern, secular society. At the absolute *heart* of the Protestant independence from the revealed Church of Christ is a denial of the Catholic understanding of the eucharistic *mysterion*. There will never be a "new position" in the Church altering the dogmatic canons of Trent regarding the Catholic understanding of this mystery. The essence of Protestant worship rests on the principle of private judgment, dissent from the Catholic tradition of revelation, and reduces to *act* the concept that the *individual* is the sole arbiter of truth. In effect he himself assumes the place of God in his life, and therefore submits neither to the true God, nor His Church, nor tradition, nor law.

To mold a modern reform of the received Catholic liturgical tradition along Protestant antecedents is certainly incredible, despite Professor White's unbridled enthusiasm in that regard. It would be to imbed within Catholic worship newly crafted texts designed to reinforce *not-so-new* "human values" that, in fact, are common to the thinking of both the 16th century reformers and modern libertarians. This is inconceivable from the Catholic point of view.

Herein arises the real conundrum in the new rule of Catholic worship since liturgy is *theologia prima*, the source of faith and practice. It is the thing *given* by God through the patrimony of the Church as a *continuous whole*. It is *received* by man – including the guardians of the Church's mysteries – and must be approached with humility, reverence, a keen awareness of fallen nature's frailties, seeking in it what it says to us and *not* what we would rather impose on it. The Eucharistic liturgy in particular is the summit to which and from which all else in the life of the Church and the faithful flows.

What Cardinal Ratzinger calls the “asceticism of truth”^[32] is particularly needed in the intellectual life of the Church today. It is nowhere *more* important than when rightly understanding and respecting the spectrum of all antecedents involved when touching the very foundation of Catholic life: its *received* forms of worship. This most important point will continue to be developed throughout the whole of Part II.

It is impossible to “pass through the curtain,” to use the Cardinal’s phrase, to enter into the true life of Christ, without practicing what he *means* by the “asceticism of truth”: capturing the right relationship of truth and faith, and the concomitant practice of ascetic submission to laws higher than self and personal opinion. This practice of humility of will, reason, and body is the one thing capable of correcting what he refers to as “our present age when it gets lost in its own fantasies”.^[33]

This can only happen when *humility* is recognized as *the* substrate to holiness, and that the flesh must be curbed by a reasoned physical denial – not pampered through gratification in its enormous variety – and reparation made for sin committed. This ascetic aspect of Christian faith and practice must be readily evident in and around the public worship of the Church. This is certainly the case in the *vetus ordo* of the Latin Rite.

While it is the duty of the Church’s hierarchy to protect and foster the full deposit of faith – of which humility and mortification are intrinsic and inseparable constituents – the following observation by Romano Amerio, unfortunately, is not without foundation:

The important fact about the present state of the Church is, however, that [a] superficial spirit that undervalues and ridicules mortification of the sense, has spread to the clergy, who have thus lost any understanding of, or attachment to, the traditional discipline.^[34]

The following is even more true:

The Church has no reason to be ashamed of its legislation or to think its doctrine ridiculous; it was, in fact perfectly reasonable, based on nature, commanded by Christ and sanctioned by the obedience of generations that were not rougher or less fragile than the present, merely more thoughtful and less sensual.^[35]

If there is a lacuna in the liturgical manifestation of our duty to distrust ourselves, rely on God, fear His judgment, and trust in His merciful love, there will inevitably appear another great danger, now everywhere apparent. Christians, clergy and laity alike, are increasing in a worldly pride that undermines and permits dissent from the historical Way. Pelagian in its self-reliance, salvation is transforming into a kind of earthly self-realization. This is perceptible in liturgical “retouchings” that have significantly recast – *not* restored – the sources. None of this can achieve real freedom as the immense erosion of faith, morals, and decomposition in civil and ecclesial society indicates. What is more, as long and as often as dissent and independence continue, the Church will continue to suffer, the distance ever increasing between its already marked polarities.

2. *Martyrdom’s devotion*, or the ascetic imitation of Christ, is fostered in the Church principally by the liturgy, secondly by teaching, and lastly protected and guided by laws that are actually enforced. Since this paper primarily addresses the liturgical question, the remainder of this chapter will be limited to the question of asceticism as it is intrinsically united to liturgy and its approach.

To be sure the public worship of the Church’s predominant characteristic is *latreutic*. But it contains many other convergent elements that bring to it the full fabric of its integral function and impact. A strong didactic element is found imbedded within its prayers and practices. Neither an exposition of the theology of sacrifice as manifest through the liturgy, nor the mystical associations of human offering with the sacrifice of the Crucified One by union with liturgical worship, is the purpose of what follows. While the importance of neither of these is to be overlooked, what is addressed, rather, are those immediate and tangible

elements either teaching or intrinsically fostering the virtues of humility, sacrifice, and penance when the Christian person approaches liturgy as such.

Before all else in liturgical analysis the primary antecedent is *humility before the source itself*. Already the ascetic principle of faith is operative, understanding that the liturgical *traditio* is not "some old piece of cloth", to use a famous phrase of Cardinal Ottaviani, open to free flight or arbitrary incisions and repiecing. The texts, gestures, signs, symbols, music, full panoply of the liturgical culture all have, together, an internal cohesion, sense, depth, and character. The thing itself deserves reverence because it is holy and the principle font of revelation. In the words of Pope Pius XII, "liturgical rites...deserve reverence and respect. They...owe their inspiration to the Holy Spirit..."^[36]

To analyze the presence of ascetic principle as fostered through worship, a first focus must be directed towards liturgical texts themselves, examining their doctrinal content in view of the received tradition of ascetic discipline. This would include an examination of the collects, biblical readings, and psalm selections found in the proper texts, analyzing them in the context of the whole of Scripture's witness, Patristic prayer and writings, and the Church's entire historical tradition of ascetic theology and practice.

The temporal cycles of the liturgy should be examined for clear evidence of seasons wherein ascetic practices are particularly focused upon as union with the suffering of Christ and reparation for personal sin committed. An analysis of the balance of the full spectrum of theological truths should be pursued, noting the *absence of imbalance* in favor of one or other aspect of the Paschal mystery. This will be evident not only in the texts themselves, but in the liturgical culture of ceremony and music. One should note if the physical seasons of the year are delineated liturgically by shorter seasons of penance and prayer characteristic of the received, veterotestamentary tradition at the foundation of the Christian dispensation.

The sanctoral cycle should be examined for the values of humility and self-denial underlying the sacrificial life of every canonized Saint, their union with the sacrifice of Jesus being the very foundation of all sanctity. The universal value of self-sacrifice will transcend every other manifestation of saintly living except prayer itself. Therefore in the selection and on-going revision of the sanctoral calendar, despite the proclivities of various ages, the two-edged sword of self-denial and prayer will always be a constant. Such an examination should reveal a complete ascetic balance in the collects, the readings from Scripture, the homilies appointed for the Divine Office; severance of martyrdom's devotion from prayer will not normally be found in the overall scheme of liturgical texts.

Removing this examination to a different level, and more nuanced in its didactic influence, the liturgical culture itself will reflect, in its principles and practice, a discipline of humble sacrifice.

This involves the virtues of humility and self-discipline in the face of the externals of liturgical action. Public worship is certainly more than rubrics, but obedience to liturgical directives comprises a disciplined, and at times demanding form of humility and penance:

Being an action of public and social character, the liturgy must have its laws to order and regulate it. This complexus of ecclesiastical decisions which go to make up the ceremonial must be well known and observed if the celebration of the rites and the practice of ceremonies is to be worthy and orderly and is to express the meaning which the Church wishes to give it.^[37]

The careful preparation and enactment of the matter of public worship represents a self-disciplined humility. What is more, the length of liturgical actions, the relative inconveniences of wearing prescribed garments, the use of prescribed instruments and sacramentals, and careful observance of prescribed actions, all represent a sacrifice of will that obeys and cooperates with the directives of the Church. In some instances this can

even become a physical penance given the preparation demanded and the length and complication in effectively enacting the prescribed ceremonies, processions, blessings, and various observances. Therefore the *cultural* patrimony of worship calls upon an active asceticism that is readily apparent in the various usages that surround the liturgical texts themselves.

The *art* of liturgical instruments themselves demand another form of humility and rigorous discipline. The liturgy reflects two things: God's descent to man and man's elevation to God. The liturgical culture – *that much greater whole within which the texts themselves subsist* – must reflect the right relation between God and man. In this regard the entire ensemble must necessarily reflect the absolute majesty of the former, and the dependent, impoverished humility of the latter. For this reason the liturgy must not be profane but sacred, and in its material character must be discernibly *other* than the daily actions of common life.

For the reason just given music, its proper character, suitable preparation, and employment comprises a discipline that has received great attention, particularly in papal legislation since the beginning of the present century. Conformity to the directives of the Church in this regard comprises a very great form of humility, studious obedience, and a disciplined offering.

This liturgical *ensemble* contributes to a right understanding and approach to Christ in His sacrificial office as Priest, into Whose atoning death all Christians must enter. The sometimes cavalier attitude of many towards the texts and rubrics, the suitable matter, choice and accomplishment of music, and suitability of vesture and art is certainly more marked now than when the *vetus ordo* was in universal force. The liturgy is a school in which the mystery of Christ's triumph in God, in Himself, in the saints, and in us is rehearsed and placed before the faithful for edification and emulation. This great mystery engages a humble response in approaching, accomplishing, learning, and living the truth that it is and contains. For this reason, considered in its entirety, the liturgy, "in giving to the Eucharist, Sacrifice and Sacrament, all its powerful efficacy over our souls, is the universal and official school of true asceticism..."^[38]

This element is the foundation of Christian faith and practice. Therefore, in any assessment of liturgy as such, humility, obedience, and penance are absolutely necessary antecedents to its understanding and accomplishment. It is only by the possession and practice of these virtuous correctives that one is able to approach the liturgy for what it is: *the source of the Christian faith and life.*

^[1] Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song For The Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, trans. Martha M. Matesich (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996), 21.

^[2] *Ibid.*, 10.

^[3] *Ibid.*, 167.

^[4] *Ibid.*, 9.

^[5] *Ibidem.*

^[6] *Ibid.*, 55.

^[7] *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

^[8] Robert Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), 84.

^[9] Pope John XXIII, "Opening Speech to the Assembled Fathers of the Second Council at the Vatican", 11 October 1962, in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 715.

^[10] Bork, 84.

^[11] Ratzinger, *A New Song For the Lord*, 14, 15.

^[12] *Ibid.*, 27.

^[13] Ibid., 31.

^[14] James Hitchcock, "The Age of the Laity", in *Catholic Dossier*, 13 May 1998,

^[15] Ibid.

^[16] Amerio, 243.

^[17] Ibid., 243, 244.

^[18] Ibid., 238; quoting from *De perfectionis vitae hominis*, Ch. VIII, 18 in P.L., 44, 300.

^[19] Ibid., 244.

^[20] Ibid., 241.

^[21] Ibidem.

^[22] Ibid., 242.

^[23] Ibidem.

^[24] Ibid., 238.

^[25] Ibid., 236.

^[26] Mahony, Roger, "Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide For Sunday Mass," appearing in *Origins*, Vol. 27, No. 15, 25 September 1997, 245. This short paragraph evinces two things that bear examination in view of this entire study:

Entrance processions: In the received tradition of the West, these are ceremonial, liturgical actions carried out in the course of public worship according to the rubrical prescriptions of the received books. They are *proximate actions* of the ministers and participants in the enactment of public worship. The *remote preparations* of the faithful in betaking themselves to the place of public worship does not constitute in any liturgical sense what the Catholic west has received as being a "procession".

This is an example of how the received tradition is simply recast and then confused when overextended in search of "new insights". The result is a change in the *meaning of received terms*, ending with the blurring of distinctions – in this case between the sacred action of worship, and the profane action of human preparation for it. Cardinal Ratzinger mentioned this in his *Address to the Bishops of Chile* (op. cit.) when he said, "After the Council many consciously made "desacralization" a program of action. ...Worship, to the extent that it must be performed, should be expressed in the non-sacrality of daily life...and [this has in certain measures] reduced liturgy to the language and gestures of ordinary life by means of greetings, public signs of friendship, and similar things... With such theory and practice we have certainly lost sight of the real connection between the Old and New Testaments."

This process leads to an inevitable confusion among many since only those possessing a certain kind of erudition can untangle the whole. Many of the faithful can only follow the progression superficially; many are confused by what becomes, in effect, incomprehensible, or some cases meaningless (i.e. the parishioner who is informed in a sermon that the "entrance rite begins in the parking lot").

This concept of human preparation being "the true entrance procession", has, however, been taken without reference from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's book, *For the Life of the World*, (Crestwood, Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988, pp. 27 and 28). Fr Schmemmann is a priest of the Orthodox Church of America and develops a liturgical theology expressive of his understanding of the eastern tradition. That the eastern liturgical understanding can be applied analogously to the west is certain, but the manner in which it is done must be carefully developed within the western framework of its own practice and tradition. For an interesting illumination of source material unknown to most Catholics reading the Cardinal's pastoral, the text under consideration should be compared with Fr. Schmemmann's description of "sacramental journey", noting the close parallel between the concepts and phrases used by Fr. Schmemmann and the same concepts and phrases developed in this section of the pastoral letter.

In regard to fasting: Prescinding from the "many families" "conscious of the one hour fast" and therefore observing it, are all the *other* families. (Since the adjective *many* is not a comparative, the remainder from which the *many* are coming is undoubtedly *more*, for otherwise the adjective *most* would have been applied to all those who *are* fasting. As more than half comprises a simple majority, the other families who are not fasting are – according to the sense of this statement – probably more numerous than those who are fasting, or, logically, the majority of the parish.) This certainly *sizable* group of Catholics not fasting and going to Mass, are, in today's climate, most likely on their way to receiving Holy Communion as well. These other families then are either 1.) not conscious of the one hour fast and therefore not observing it, or 2.) conscious of it and ignoring it.

In possibility 1. the value of the promulgated law is denigrated by *ignorance* of it and inadvertent failure to keep it. In possibility 2. the law is denigrated by wilful, advertent disobedience towards its command. In both cases the many persons involved who do receive Holy Communion without fasting violate the Church's publicly promulgated law and commit sin. Within this context, the pastoral letter makes no mention of the Sacrament of Penance relative to receiving Holy Communion without keeping the Church's reduced law of eucharistic fast. In a word, the law has little bearing, if any, on the issue, morally or spiritually.

In mentioning "here and there are *adults* who choose to fast altogether" another aspect of the situation comes to light: there are many *families* not fasting which include the more numerous adults than the scattered "here and there" who are, as well as all the children of a certain age who are also required by canon law to fast but are not doing so. Children are not adults, and no children are understood in this context to be fasting.

Fifty years ago nearly *every adult and child of age* would have been knowingly fasting from midnight, and would have received Holy Communion on an empty stomach in conformity to tradition, devotion, and submission to ecclesial law in union with the whole of the Church. In any of the possibilities spelled out or implied in the pastoral for the ideal parish of the year 2000, only the “here and there” adult, and no children, are supposed observing the received sense of Church *fasting* (that is, “fasting altogether”), and that only by free choice, *not* from humble obedience to an ecclesial precept, in union with the whole Church, according to the Church’s received tradition, motivated, at least virtually, by obedience to God.

In the scenario Cardinal Mahony envisions, except for these latter who are observing a longer fast out of personal devotion, those who *do* observe the minimum fast prescribed by current law are described in the pastoral as “finishing break-fast” [because they are] “conscious of the one hour fast”. That one can *break fast* so that one may immediately *keep fast* for 60 minutes is precisely the kind of casuistry the old laws are wrongfully accused of provoking: it is a case of “hurry up and eat” so that one can manage a 60 minute hiatus until the next feeding.

The sense of fasting evinced in the pastoral, at best, means a very short abstention between times of eating, the period being sustained by a full stomach. The example for doing this is set by parents in front of children who can either know no differently, or, more likely – as the young are wont to do – see obvious contradictions in adult behavior.

None of this constitutes fasting in any received sense of the term. “Fasting” in this context actually means being able to ingest food within 35 minutes of the typical Roman parochial Sunday Mass and then receive Holy Communion on a full stomach. What is more, this will be done by adults and children perfectly capable of the traditional discipline of fasting mortification, and who are, thus, deprived of its spiritual benefits. That those “fasting” only comprise “many” of the adults of the parish, the rest ignorant of the obligation or disobeying it, is in contrast to the norm of fifty years ago when everyone without exception knew of the obligation to fast and the sinfulness in disobeying it. This new state of affairs is *certainly* contrary to the received tradition of the Church.

What is even more evident is the distinction made in the pastoral itself between an *eat-and-fast* fast, and a *fast-altogether* fast. This last distinction is a real one: the former is entirely unrelated to the Church’s received practice, the latter is only partially in conformity to it (since it is only devotional, and does not derive the merit and spiritual grace of obedience to precept). The two positions are incomprehensibly joined in a single, short paragraph beginning with a confused explanation about entrance processions

^[27] Amerio, 236.

^[28] Abortion, for example, is often an eleventh-hour form of contrived birth control by which the unjust killing of an innocent human becomes the remedy for the irresponsible sexual gratification of one or both of its parents.

^[29] Ratzinger, *La Mia Vita*, Giuseppe Reguzzoni, trans. (Torino: Edizioni San Paolo, 1997), 113.

^[30] Quoted in Anthony Cekada, *The Problems With the Prayers of the Modern Mass* (Rockford: TAN Books, 1991), 10.

^[31] James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 101.

^[32] Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song For the Lord*, 10. “We will have to listen to the sources which, by bearing witness to the origin, correct our present age when it gets lost in its own fantasies. This humble submission to the word of the sources, this willingness to let our dreams be snatched away from us and to obey the reality is a basic condition for true encounter. Encounter demands the asceticism of truth, the humility of hearing and seeing which leads to the authentic grasping of the truth.”

^[33] Ibidem.

^[34] Amerio, 239.

^[35] Amerio, 240.

^[36] Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 61.

^[37] Gabriel Braso, *Liturgy and Spirituality*, Leonard J. Doyle, trans. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1960), 53.

^[38] Lambert Beauduin, *Liturgy, The Life of the Church*, Virgil Michel, trans. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1926), 66.