

The Theology of the Liturgy of Joseph Ratzinger in the Theology of History

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Abstract

The Christian liturgy is a complex interplay between cosmic and historical narratives, sanctifying the connection between the cosmos and human history. It originates from the divine act of creation, which is understood as a liturgical act that gives essence and meaning to existence. Theologian Joseph Ratzinger suggests that liturgy foreshadows the *parousia*, intertwining the physical and spiritual realms. He emphasizes that liturgy is a form of anticipation—a prelude to the life to come, specifically eternal life. Ratzinger asserts that without the Cross and the Resurrection, Christian worship is meaningless; a theology of liturgy that omits these elements would merely be discussing an empty practice. In other words, nothing should be preferred over the liturgy. The interaction between the cosmos and human history fosters a communal understanding of reality and fulfills humanity's spiritual journey. Christ is the focal point of this liturgical celebration, creating a transformative experience that connects the past, present, and future in faith. A Christianity without liturgy would ultimately be a Christianity without Christ—a Christianity devoid of the fullness of Christ.

Keywords

Liturgy, Theology of Liturgy, Christ the Focal Point, Interaction of Cosmos and Humanity History

1. Introduction

This paper examines the theology of Joseph Ratzinger's liturgy within the framework of the theology of history. It will focus on the center and end of history in Christ. The word liturgy refers to a work or public service. The Greek *leitourgia* comes from the words *laos* (people) and *ergon* (work). I am impressed by J. Martos in his approach to defining liturgy. He has kept some interesting definitions

of the liturgy given by Fagerberg in his *Theologia Prima*: “Liturgy is the place of communion with God. Liturgy is the manifestation of the new creation, which is the God-man perpetuated temporally, personally, sacramentally, and socially. Liturgy is not just a ritual; it is a way of living and a way of thinking, expressed through rituals. The Liturgy does not just make the thinker think doxologically or theologize prayerfully; it forms a believer whose life is theological” (Martos, 2009).

The essence of the liturgy is the actual work or action accomplished by the grace of God in Christ, and not the ceremonies. Christ’s action is to redeem, to save the whole of humanity from sin and to make all holy. It is fulfilled, truly realised, not just symbolised. Through the liturgy, Christ, Redeemer and High Priest, continues his work of redemption. Liturgy is at the heart of the theology of the Cross and stands at the centre of the cosmic drama of Christ’s Resurrection. In addition to being a work of God, the liturgy is also a human work, which is not added to the divine work, but rather participates in it. Ratzinger emphasizes the connection between the liturgy and the unfolding narrative of salvation history,

The liturgy is, for Ratzinger, an expression of the eschatological fulfilment, encounter of the centre and end of history in Christ, who is the *Kairos*, and all things are centralised in him. For Ratzinger, this understanding of Jesus as *Kairos* signifies that Jesus embodies the fullness of God’s intervention in human history. In this formulation, *Kairos* refers to the concept of divine time — a moment of grace and fulfillment that transcends ordinary chronological time (*Chronos*). Ratzinger emphasized that in Jesus, the eternal enters into temporal existence. This means that through Christ, believers encounter a pivotal moment of transformation and redemption that is not bound by the flow of time but instead offers a profound opportunity for spiritual awakening and communion with God in the liturgy. He is made constantly and newly present and glorified as the norm of history. The liturgy involves not only individuals, but also the Church, the society, and the universe. The presence of Christ in the liturgy at the midpoint between God and creation, heaven and earth, new age and old, Church and world, is threefold: he is really present and not absent, he is present and not past, and he offers himself as a present, that is to say, as a gift of grace. In the liturgy, eternity is anticipated, and the end is celebrated. Thus, in Ratzinger’s viewpoint, eschatology moves from the last to the centre in the Risen Lord. That is the major concern of this paper.

2. The Nature and Essence of the Liturgy

Animated by the will to grasp the nature, the essence, and the reality of the liturgy, Ratzinger interprets Israel’s Flight from Egypt, the Mosaic Law, the Bull Calf narrative, and the theory of play that has some similarities with the liturgy.

2.1. Israel’s Flight

The Israelites’ flight from Egypt appears to have two primary objectives. The first is the settling in the Promised Land. It is the main content of the promises of God to Abraham. The objective of the divine plan in Exodus is a return to humanity’s

state in Eden, so that God can dwell with the Israelites as He had with Adam and Eve, who together form a model of the universe. In the later Abrahamic religions, Israel is conceived as the guardian of God's plan for humanity, bringing God's blessings to mankind. The second is God's worship through the liturgy (Olver, 2017).

It goes without saying that the discussion between Pharaoh and Moses on the plagues (Exod 7-10) shows that the liturgy originates from God through revelation. God ordered Pharaoh to live His people so that they may serve Him: "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness" (Exod 7:16). This command is repeated four times differently in all the dialogues between Pharaoh with Moses and Aaron (cf. Exod 8:1; 9:1, 13; 10:3). Pharaoh replied to this command: "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land" (Exod 8:25). The commanded place for the worship is the wilderness but the compromise of Pharaoh limits it to the land. Later on, after the plagues, he will extend it. Moses firmly states that according to the will of the Lord the worship should be done out: "We must go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us" (Exod 8:27). Moses's position allows to note that liturgy cannot be negotiated with human authorities, neither worship cannot be subjected to political power nor its rite can be a political question. Because the worship of God is primordial, false worship is one of the greatest evils man can practice. Idolatry, in its broader sense, is properly understood as any substitution of what is created for the Creator. People may worship nature, money, mankind, power, history, or social and political systems instead of the God who created them all. Idolatry was a constant threat to Israel (Ratzinger, 2008b).

Man cannot invent a cult: "and we will not know what to use to worship the Lord..." (Exod 10:26b) (Ratzinger, 2001). Ratzinger, basing especially on this dialogue and generally on the Pentateuch, supports the idea that the real purpose of the Exodus is worship, the freedom to give adoration to God in the liturgy willed by Him, the unknown mountain of God, and the service of God (Ratzinger, 2008b). Accordingly, it should be noticed that humanity's *telos* and perfect freedom are worship (Olver, 2017). They embark on a journey to become individuals unlike others, but people who serve and adore God. He establishes a connection between land and cult. Therefore, the land is given to become a locus for adoration and living according to the will of the Creator. That is what distinguishes them from other people. God is the centre of their life and liturgical celebrations. He liberated them because He wants the world to know just how powerful, honest, true, Faithful, and Glorious He is. It is so evident throughout the Exodus that God's highest goal and purpose for liberating them from bondage, as in creating the world, is His own glory. God's goal, even in expressing wrath and judgment, is His glory and for the good of His children (Ratzinger, 2001).

2.2. The Mosaic Law

God decides to intervene in the life of the Hebrews, slaves of Pharaoh, to give them

freedom and to gather them into a holy nation. After leaving Egypt, as they crossed the wilderness, God spoke, and a people was formed gradually. However, they must purify themselves and renounce the various seductions. The Mosaic Law refers to the set of precepts given to the Jewish people by Moses, as recorded in the Torah. This expression is found in the Old Testament (2 Kgs 14:6), and in certain passages of the New Testament, such as the Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:22ff). It is an administration of law in that the Lord bound individuals and tribes together into one nation by detailed regulations. The law was God's means of shaping Israel into a community. The covenant at Sinai opened a new era in the history of God's people. It marked the next stage in fulfilling the Abrahamic promises. God had consecrated Israel as a witness to the nations by showing them in the Law how to mirror His perfections. The legal system of any other people reflects the culture of those people. Through God's Law, however, the godly came to know how to reflect God's love, compassion, fidelity, and other perfections. Israel was to ground her faith in the precepts of the Divine Law, which identified God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Promise-Giver, the Land-Giver, and the Exodus-Causer. Every statute was a testimony to the election of the people and a witness to their identification with their sovereign Lord. Nonetheless, this election does not exclude the possibility of the goyim (the gentiles), also descendants of Adam and Eve, joining the covenant (De Gaal, 2010).

At Sinai, they received the Law, which would enable Israel to become a free people. Then, cult, law, and ethics are essentially interwoven. God is the reference of the authentic law and justice. On this note, it is stated that cult and justice are substantially together. The covenant was concluded in the form of the liturgy. On the mountain, the people received instructions about worship and the law. This law is a common rule for a righteous life. This alone makes the land a truly remarkable gift. A society which is not based on God degrades man and deprives him of the infinite and eternal vision (Ratzinger, 2008b). Consequently, each value becomes totalitarian (De Gaal, 2010). The burning aspiration of humanity is to become the glory of God (Olver, 2017). Saint Irenaeus brilliantly put it in these words: "The glory of God is the living man, but the life of man is the vision of God" (Ratzinger, 2008b). The land becomes a true good only when it is the realm of God's reign. Consequently, it becomes the realm of obedience where God's will is done, and the right human existence is developed. The Promised Land differs from other lands and states. It is an exterior land, whereas their heart is the interior land: "Sinai is not a halfway house, a kind of stop for refreshment on the road to what matters. No, Sinai gives Israel, so to speak, its interior land without which the exterior one would be a cheerless prospect" (Ratzinger, 2008b).

After receiving the covenant, the entrance to the Promised Land was opened. There is a connection between their interior life and the state of the land. The rejection of the true adoration goes hand in hand with the loss of freedom. The complete loss of the law leads to exile. Freedom and law are substantially connected. When the reality of Sinai is forgotten, the land will also be lost. Whenever

the Lord is rejected, freedom collapses. The law of the Lord guides human activities. They are realities from God and will return to Him. The cult is the soul of the covenant and the heart of their freedom, unity, and law. This cult is identified with the life of a just person. The liturgy helps the latter to participate in anticipation of heavenly existence (Ratzinger, 2001).

2.3. The Fundamental Form of the Liturgy

In all worship, what is offered is not the real gift but a replacement. All the religions' notions of sacrifice rest on the concept of representation. The fact that the sacrifice of animals or fruits can make expiation constitutes a replacement and not a representation. The liturgy of Israel differs from that of other religions because it is oriented solely toward God. He is given a cult through a sacrificial system. The second difference drawn from the liturgy of Israel is that it is aimed at Jesus Christ. The cultic theology of the New Testament is closely tied to the inner drama of the Old Testament. These two cults conflict but are united in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. The fundamental truth about the nature of sacrifice in both Testaments is that "the only real gift man should give to God is himself" (Olver, 2017).

At the beginning of cultic history, the problem of representation is evident in the *Akedah* (binding) of Isaac and Abraham (Gen 22) and the institution of the Passover liturgy (Exod 12). The representative sacrifice is from the divine command. Instead of his son Abraham, after being stopped by God, he was given a male lamb. Moreover, the sacrifice offered in the liturgy is from God himself. God always initiates and provides what is necessary for the sacrifice to be made (Olver, 2017). The Passover lamb is the centre of the liturgical year and Israel's memorial. This lamb refers to the sanctification of man and the all creation. The Passover sacrifice places an obligation on the firstborn, and in them, on the people and creation as a whole. John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb. The Revelation portrays this Lamb as the centre of the heavenly liturgy (cf. Rev 5) (De Gaal, 2010). Saint Luke (cf. Luke 2:7) presents Jesus as the firstborn, and the Captivity Epistles describe him as the firstborn of creation (cf. Rom 8:29) (Ratzinger, 2008b).

Jesus brought the sacrifice to perfection. He places mercy over sacrifice: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). The earthly Temple was a replica, not the true one. The prophecy of the destruction of the Temple refers to its cleansing. It is a prophecy of the Cross. The death of his body will be the end of the Temple. That is why, during the death of Jesus, the veil of the Temple was torn in two (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). It also signifies that the curtain was torn between the world and God. It is also meant by the fact of dying with outstretched arms. He calls all men into the embrace of eternal love. In the pierced heart of the Crucified, God's own heart is opened up – here we see who God is and what he is like. Heaven is no longer locked up. God has stepped out of his hiddenness. That is why St. John sums up both the meaning of the Cross and the nature of the new worship of God in the mysterious promise made through the

prophet Zechariah (cf. 12:10). “They shall look on him whom they have pierced” (John 19:37) (Ratzinger, 2008b). The Christian liturgy is the worship of an open heaven. The divine worship was renewed and the liturgy was given its final form: the universality (John 4:23), which is the newness of the ecclesiology of the New Testament:

...universality is an essential feature of Christian worship. It is the worship of an open heaven. It is never just an event in the life of a community that finds itself in a particular place. No, to celebrate the Eucharist means to enter into the openness of a glorification of God that embraces both heaven and earth, an openness effected by the Cross and Resurrection. Christian liturgy is never just an event organized by a particular group or set of people or even by a particular local Church. Mankind’s movement toward Christ meets Christ’s movement toward men. He wants to unite mankind and bring about the one Church, the horizontal and the vertical, the uniqueness of God and the unity of mankind, the communion of all who worship in spirit and truth (Ratzinger, 2008b).

The liturgy is more diverse and more changeable than the symbols or laws because it is a common work of God and man, not just a work of God. It is less one-sided than symbols and laws, because symbols summarise the truth that comes from God, not from man, and the commandments summarise the moral requirements that come from God, not from man. Maximus the Confessor views the liturgy as an effective work. For him, the liturgy is more than a mere symbol; it represents, in modern terms, an *opus operatum*, a genuine transformation of the world into a transfigured, divinized existence. (Von Balthasar, 2003). However, although the forms of the liturgy are diverse and changing, its substance remains constant; it is also solid, resistant, and steep as the cross. When people think of the Catholic liturgy, some think of Gothic cathedrals with their dark interiors and mysterious atmosphere, featuring stained glass, incense, and solemn organ music. Others think of simplicity and monastic interiority. Others think of the good music. However, it is all accidental. Kreeft spells it out in more detail:

Liturgy is not essentially a matter of aesthetic beauty or psychological feelings. It is essentially the work of our salvation, accomplished by God in Christ, applied to our lives through the Church’s sacramental rites. “The mystery celebrated in the liturgy is one, but the forms of its celebration are diverse” (Paragraph 1200, *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 2013). For “the mystery of Christ is so unfathomably rich that it cannot be exhausted by its expression in any single liturgical tradition....” (Paragraph 1201, *CCC*, 2013; Kreeft, 2021).

It is the form of true worship. The resurrection will open the door of the new Temple, that is, the risen body of Jesus. It is a non-human-made tabernacle, a place of true liturgy which replaces the shadow with the reality. It is open to all

nations, and all are incorporated in it (cf. Mark 11:17). As sacrificed, the body of Christ is living. This is the mystery revealed in the Mass. The prophecy of the resurrection cannot be separated from the Eucharist, which is the meeting point of all the lines that lead the whole of human religious history from the Old Testament. It is the door that is ever opened to adoration, the true Sacrifice (Ratzinger, 2008b). It is the mystery of faith per excellence and constitutes the sum and summary of the Christian faith (Sacrosanctum Concilium 6). It is the end in itself and exists for the sake of God. Guardini notes:

The liturgy has no purpose, or, at least, it cannot be considered from the standpoint of purpose. It is not a means which is adapted to attain a certain end – it is an end in itself... When the liturgy is rightly regarded, it cannot be said to have a purpose because it does not exist for the sake of humanity but for the sake of God. In the liturgy, man is no longer concerned with himself; his gaze is directed towards God. In it, man is not so much intended to edify himself as to contemplate God's majesty. The liturgy means that the soul exists in God's presence, originates in Him, lives in a world of divine realities, truths, mysteries and symbols, and really lives its true, characteristic and fruitful life (Guardini, 1998).

2.4. The Bull Calf Narrative

Liturgy is ordered according to the measure of revelation in dependency upon God (Ratzinger, 2008b). That is why the answer of Moses to Pharaoh constitutes the fundamental law of all liturgy: "We do not know with what we must serve the Lord" (Exod 10:26). When man takes by himself the initiative before God reveals himself, he can from the sense of God within him, build altars to the unknown god (Acts 17:23). Liturgy is not therefore springing from imagination, personal creativity, and is not the matter of what pleases. If that is the case, it will be a simple cry in the dark or just a self-affirmation. It requires a genuine relationship with the Lord (Ratzinger, 2008b).

There are several cultic narratives in the Old Testament. The golden calf narrative (strictly, it is bull calf narrative) appears to be the most dramatic (Exod 32). This cult is not destined to the false gods of the heathen but to the True God. They glorify and recognise the power of the Lord who liberated them from Egypt. The celebration conforms to the rubrics. In this celebration, seemingly right, two interdictions are transgressed: the representation of the image and the manipulation of God. It is a subtle apostasy. They move thus from worship of God to idolatry. The first Christian martyr, Stephen, referred to this sad moment in Israel's history, saying: "In their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron: Make us gods who will go before us." (Acts 7:39-40). They wanted to make God the one who fits into their view: "They want to bring him down into their own world, into what they can see and understand. Worship is no longer going up to God, but drawing God down into one's own world. He must be there when it is needed, and he must be the kind of God that is needed" (Ratzinger, 2008b).

They subjected God to man. It is a total abandonment of the Creator. Consequently, he is excluded, and the worship becomes a circle closed in on itself: eating, drinking, making merry. Man looks for his own satisfaction. This cult is self-generated. An apostasy is, in fact, a sacred disguise. Therefore, liturgy becomes pointless, arbitrary, and egocentric (Ratzinger, 2001).

2.5. Liturgy and Life

Liturgy is the faith of the Church in motion; it is not just a ritual, but a way of living and thinking expressed ritually. It is at the centre of life's faith (Martos, 2009). Willing to grasp the essence of the liturgy, Ratzinger establishes an analogy with the theory of play. A game has its own rules, its own world, which is active from the beginning of the play but is suspended at the close of the play. Romano Guardini offered two analogies in his defence: the play of a child and the creation of an artist (Guardini, 1998). The liturgy unites art and reality. A play does not have a purpose, though it has a meaning. Consequently, something is healing and liberating about it. It releases a person for a while from all the burdens of their daily work world. It is an oasis of freedom. The time to play is a time of retreat from the pressure of daily life. Children's play is like an anticipation of life, a rehearsal for future life without burdens. The liturgy reminds us to be children, in relation to the true life to which we are heading. Regarding ordinary play, the liturgical play-theory of liturgy is the play of Wisdom, bearing an eschatological dimension, and refers to God (Ratzinger, 2008b). It is "the work of Christ the Priest and His Body, which is the Church" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7). In fact, God is the one who acts through Jesus Christ in the Liturgy. Thus, the *Logos* speaks to us, comes with His Body and Soul, His Flesh and Blood, His Divinity and His Humanity, to bring the whole creation to Himself (Ratzinger, 2008b). In this logic, liturgy becomes (Ratzinger, 2008b):

A kind of anticipation, a rehearsal, a prelude for the life to come, for eternal life, which St. Augustine describes, by contrast with life in this world, as a fabric woven, no longer of exigency and need, but of the freedom of generosity and gift. Seen thus, liturgy would be the rediscovery within us of true childhood, of openness to a greatness still to come, which is still unfulfilled in adult life. Here, then, would be the concrete form of hope, which lives in advance the life to come, the only true life, which initiates us into authentic life—the life of freedom, of intimate union with God, of pure openness to our fellow-man. Thus, it would imprint on the seemingly real life of daily existence the mark of future freedom, break open the walls that confine us, and let the light of heaven shine down upon earth.

Liturgy has a festal character, and a feast is about freedom. It is the feast of faith. A feast is made to be such by the concrete community experience of a group of people belonging to that community. It is facilitated by spontaneity, free expression, creativity, and departure from routine. The feast establishes a foundation for

the community. There needs to be a reason, a cause, prior to individuals' will for the feast to be made. The liturgy is thus the feast of redemption. It is an experience of liberation from self-alienation, from a society in which the self is repressed, as every feast has a cosmic and universal character. The reason for this Christian feast is Christ's resurrection, which enables man to rejoice truly.

As a feast, liturgy goes beyond the realm of what can be made and manipulated; it introduces us to the realm of given, living reality, which communicates itself to us. That is why, at all times and in all religions, the fundamental law of liturgy has been the law of organic growth within the universality of the common tradition. Even in the huge transition from the Old to the New Testament, this rule was not breached; the continuity of liturgical development was not interrupted: Jesus introduced his words at the Last Supper organically into the Jewish liturgy at the point where it was open to them, as it were, waiting for them. The growing Church carefully continued this process of inwardly deepening, purifying, and expanding the Old Testament inheritance. Neither the apostles nor their successors made a Christian liturgy; it grew organically as a result of the Christian reading of the Jewish inheritance, fashioning its own form as it did so (Ratzinger, 2008b).

In this sense, the liturgy is essentially the feast of the Resurrection (*Mysterium Paschae*) and bears the mystery of the Cross. Pius XII declares:

In the sacred liturgy, the whole Christ is proposed to us in all the circumstances of His life, as the Word of the eternal Father, as born of the Virgin Mother of God, as He who teaches us truth, heals the sick, consoles the afflicted, who endures suffering and who dies; finally, as He who rose triumphantly from the dead and who, reigning in the glory of heaven, sends us the Holy Paraclete and who abides in His Church forever; Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, and the same forever. Besides, the liturgy shows us Christ not only as a model to be imitated but as a master to whom we should listen readily, a Shepherd whom we should follow, Author of our salvation, the Source of our holiness and the Head of the Mystical Body whose members we are, living by His very life (Pius XII, 1967).

Christ is ever-present in His Church, especially in the liturgical celebrations (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7). In liturgy, we express our inner life in all its fullness and depth, but without unveiling our secrets. The participant can be active without sacrificing their spiritual independence; they remain in communication with other faithful individuals without being overwhelmed by them (Guardini, 1998).

The freedom in the liturgy is about liberating the world and ourselves from death, rather than bringing personal issues. Freely we accept the truth and love one another. The feast of the Resurrection opens to worship. Those who participate in liturgical worship are like the actors of a piece or the instruments of an orchestra: each part is necessary and works in view of all. We are not going to the church as we go to the restaurant to have meals individually, but rather as we would

fight in an army or play on a football team, in order to achieve great work together. This common task is accomplished in an orderly manner under direction. Worship is the core of this celebration. The Christian liturgy recalls, actuals, and makes present the marvellous works of God and the saving events of humanity. It celebrates the mystery of salvation. The Paschal mystery is made ever new and unique by the Holy Spirit. The liturgical *anamnesis* is the core of memory, which gives history meaning and orientation (De Gaal, 2010). Liturgy cannot be made. However, it must be accepted as a given reality and continually revitalised (Ratzinger, 2008b). It is the summit towards which the whole activity of the Church is oriented and the font of all the power of the Church. The liturgy has no practical purpose. Its purpose is to worship God and raise man to the life of God. Its active work is to receive the Word of God and its thanks. Its words come from the silence in which it hears and echoes the Word of God. “The Liturgy derives its greatness from what it is, not from what we make of it. Our participation is, of course, necessary, but as a means of inserting ourselves humbly into the spirit of the Liturgy, and of serving Him Who is the true subject of the Liturgy: Jesus Christ. The liturgy is not an expression of the consciousness of a community which, in any case, is diffuse and changing” (Ratzinger, 2008b). To support this idea, we can appeal to Pope Francis, who has recently given a catechesis on the liturgy (Francis, 2021):

The liturgy, in itself, is not only spontaneous prayer, but something more and more original: it is an act that founds the whole Christian experience and, therefore, also prayer. It is an event, it is happening, it is presence, it is an encounter. It is an encounter with Christ. Christ makes himself present in the Holy Spirit through the sacramental signs; hence the need for us Christians to participate in the divine mysteries. A Christianity without a liturgy, I dare say, is perhaps a Christianity without Christ. Without Christ in full. Even in the sparest rite, such as that which some Christians have celebrated and continue to celebrate in places of incarceration, or in the seclusion of a house during times of persecution, Christ is truly present and gives Himself to His faithful.

The liturgy teaches us to hear the voice of God in creating within us the inner silence in which the soul can hear his voice. The voice of God is not loud, but rather a subtle whisper, much like Elijah had discovered a long time ago (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11-13). *La raison d’être* of liturgical words and music is to create the silence in which we hear God, to protect and surround this silence as a frame surrounds a photo. The liturgy helps us to perfect the art of listening throughout our lives. Indeed, we can hear God (and the depths of the hearts of our fellow human beings) only in the spaces that are found between the more garish passions, in subtle and discreet whispers, for love is subtle and discreet, and God is love. The criterion of a good liturgy is the silence of a love full of joy. The Catholic liturgy is the supreme example of an objective rule of spiritual life. Romano Guardini esteems that “it has been able to develop *kata ton holon*, that is to say, in every direction, and in

accordance with all places, times, and types of human culture” (Guardini, 1998).

All the activities of the Church are oriented to the sanctification of man and the glorification of God (Theandricity) (Dalmais, 1987). The goal of the liturgy is then the same as that of creation: divinization (Olver, 2017). Creation and liturgy share the same Christological foundation (Von Balthasar, 1955). In the liturgy, as the Church’s public and lawful act of worship, God is honoured by the Church as the body of the faithful, and the Church derives sanctification from this act. The individual is absorbed in the higher unity of the body of Christ (Guardini, 1998). This end is achieved in the most efficacious way in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10). Within this framework, I agree with Pope Francis, who says:

The liturgy, precisely because of its objective dimension, demands to be celebrated with fervour, so that the grace poured out in the rite is not dispersed but instead reaches the experience of all. The Catechism explains it very well; it says: “Prayer internalises and assimilates the liturgy during and after its celebration” (ibid.). Many Christian prayers do not originate from the liturgy, but all of them, if they are Christian, presuppose the liturgy, that is, the sacramental mediation of Jesus Christ. Every time we celebrate a Baptism, consecrate the bread and wine in the Eucharist, or anoint the body of a sick person with Holy Oil, Christ is here! It is He who acts and is present just as He was when He healed the weak limbs of a sick person, or when at the Last Supper He delivered His testament for the salvation of the world (Francis, 2021).

However, it is impermanent and will be perfect at the end: “Christian liturgy is on the way, a liturgy of pilgrimage toward the transfiguration of the world, which will only take place when God is all in all” (Ratzinger, 2008b). The Eucharistic celebration is particularly the source and summit of the Church’s life, expressing the origin and fulfilment of the new and ultimate liturgy, *logike latreia*. (Benedict XVI, 2007a).

3. Cosmos and History in the Liturgy

Liturgy is rooted in history and cosmos. These two dimensions have been separated by nature, in the Form of Religions. Ratzinger will unite them in his theology of the liturgy. The cosmos is viewed in liturgical anthropology as the temple, and history is seen as the stage for deification. The narrative of salvation history is indeed the text of the cosmos. Bonaventure was not then wrong when he compared the periods of salvation history to the six days of creation (Ratzinger, 1971).

3.1. Historical Dimension

Like Scripture, the liturgy is essentially historical; it is an event, not just an idea. In the liturgy, the work of Jesus is constantly brought into contact with history and penetrates it. The historical event is transcended and becomes part of the Redemption, which is the divine and human action (Ratzinger, 2008b). History finds

its full sense in freedom. It is about the perfect freedom of God who created the cosmos, and man who received it freely and takes care of it in the course of history. History is understood in terms of the Neoplatonic scheme of *exitus and reditus* (*departure and return*), which was later Christianized, as well as the *egressus* and *regressus* of Bonaventure (Ratzinger, 1971). Joseph Ratzinger explains the concept of *exitus-reditus* as a key theological idea that describes creation and its return to God. *Exitus* refers to the act of coming into existence, where the universe and humanity emerge from God, symbolizing a purposeful movement rather than separation. Conversely, *reditus* signifies the return to God, highlighting the ultimate aim of creation: reestablishing the relationship with the divine. Ratzinger presents existence as a journey where beings move away from God into the world and ultimately find true meaning in returning to Him. This expresses a cyclical view of existence, emphasizing the connection between creation and its Creator (Ratzinger, 2001, 2004).

They are the two parts of the circle of being. After creation, the creature was enabled to give in return an answer of love to the love of the Creator (Olver, 2017). It is not in the same sense as the pagan circular movement of giving and receiving by which the gods sustain the world, and humans, by their gifts, sustain the gods. Their worship is not a prayer but a manipulation. Man is ordering them. They need him; he needs them, too. The abuse of this power harms the gods and destroys man (Ratzinger, 2008b).

The *exitus* is not the fall from the infinite but God's free act of creation. It is the will of God that sees the whole creation existing as something good related to him; from it, a response of freedom and love can be given back to him. It depends on a divine decree; it is good and generates good. The creation is an act of freedom. This principle of freedom is in the essence of being. It is naturally ordered towards the *reditus* (Ratzinger, 2008b). The *reditus* is the journey back. It fulfils definitively the work of creation and establishes a dialogue of love. It creates a unity which is higher than the unity of indivisible elementary particles. It is a return which does not imply the abolition of creation. Instead, it brings this creation to its full and final perfection. Man exists for God and serves him. This is the Christian perception of God being "all in all." After straying, man is brought back to God through Christ. That is why he has been with the Publicans and sinners (Guardini, 2002). It is the *kenotic exitus* of God (Olver, 2017). However, he comes back freely. This thought is supported by the Fathers using the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15: 3-7) (Ratzinger, 2008b):

For them, the sheep caught in the thorn bush and unable to find its way home is a metaphor for man in general. He cannot get out of the thicket and find his way back to God. The shepherd who rescues him and takes him home is the Logos himself, the eternal World, the eternal Meaning of the universe dwelling in the Son. It is he who makes his way to us and takes the sheep onto his shoulders, that is, he assumes human nature, and as the God-man, he carries man the creature home to God. And so the *reditus* becomes possible.

Man is given a homecoming. But now sacrifice takes the form of the cross of Christ, of the love that in dying makes a gift of itself. Such sacrifice has nothing to do with destruction. It is an act of new creation, the restoration of creation to its true identity. All worship is now a participation on this “Pasch” of Christ, in his “passing over” from divine to human, from death to life, to the unity of God and man. Thus Christian worship is the practical application and fulfillment of the words that Jesus proclaims on the first day of Holy Week, Palm Sunday, in the Temple in Jerusalem: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).

It is the work of redemption as liberation from finitude. The unity of *exitus* and *reditus* is conserved in the liturgy. It is the end of the *exitus* and the beginning of the *reditus*. Christ is obviously the *Kairos* of this double movement. The lost *reditus* is ever and constantly possible in the liturgy, which is, in a certain manner, a celebration of history. The Christian cult is grounded in history. The time is then adoration (Ratzinger, 2001). On this reading, the effect of the liturgy is to create an alternative world of ordered life, made possible by God’s powerful word and will. Through the liturgy, man enters into the history of salvation (Brueggemann, 1997).

3.2. Cosmic Dimension

In the liturgy, the voice of nature is heard decisively. The reading of the Psalms states how man is: “courageous and despondent, happy and sorrowful, full of noble intentions, but of sin and struggles as well, zealous for everything good and then again apathetic and dejected” (Guardini, 1998). Modern theology distinguishes the Jewish-Christian religion from other religions primarily based on liturgy. The latter are cosmic, while the former are historical. The cult in nature and non-theistic higher religions is based on the cosmos, whereas in the Old and New Testament, the worship is oriented towards history. These nature religions dissociate the cosmos from history. The danger of this dissociation is that the redemption can be separated from creation. The cosmos is not an immutable reality. It is in movement, having a beginning and an end. It is, in this sense, history. Worship and cosmos are bound up together (Ratzinger, 2008b).

History and cosmos are two different circles of one circle of being. In the liturgy, all people become equal, rich and poor, master and slave. In the book of Genesis, it is clearly depicted how man and all the cosmos participate in the rest of God and express their freedom as a gift from the Creator (Gen 1:1; 2:4) (Ratzinger, 2001). Liturgy is cosmic also in the sense that it draws the entire creation into the hypostatic union (Von Balthasar, 2003). Liturgy celebrates the reality by ritualising what is steadfastly true (Martos, 2009). On this vein, De Gaal makes a brilliant observation:

The cosmic dimension of the Church’s liturgy is explained by the fact that a human being suffered the passion and thereafter entered the mystery of the infinite God. Far from any kind of human business, the Church celebrates a

liturgy in which the Son of God is with human beings. Christ becomes the actor in the Eucharistic cult. Human beings partake in the celestial liturgy of the Lamb. The addressee is God, and the intention is that human, corporeal existence is united with Christ's sacrifice as a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). "Christ himself offers worship as he stands before the Father. He becomes his members' worship as they come together with him and around him" (De Gaal, 2010).

Creation is, in fact, the place of covenant, the space of the encounter and love of God and man. Liturgy is the manifestation of the new creation in Christ. Therefore, it is the locus of adoration and communion with God (Martos, 2009). Creation is the root of humans' freedom and equality. The cult saves not only man but also all reality in communion with God. In this way, it sanctifies the entire cosmos and cures the wounded freedom. The whole universe is made the sanctuary of Christ. The liturgy reveals the right path to cosmic movement (Ratzinger, 2001) because, for Ratzinger, history is the way of humanity. It is the *civitas Dei* where Christ is the King. Everything is pure and in order. It bears the meaning of the Hebrew verb *bara* (to create). This verb has only two meanings, and Ratzinger connects it to the ceremonial law of the construction of the Tabernacle in Exodus (Ratzinger, 2008b):

It is constructed in close parallel to the account of creation. Seven times it says, "Moses did as the Lord had commanded him", words that suggest that the seven-day work on the tabernacle replicates the seven-day work on creation. The account of the construction of the tabernacle ends with a kind of vision of the Sabbath. "So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex 40:33). The completion of the tent anticipates the completion of creation. God makes his dwelling in the world. Heaven and earth are united. In this connection we should add that, in the Old Testament, the verb *bara* has two, and only two, meanings. First, it denotes the process of the world's creation, the separation of the elements, through which the cosmos emerges out of chaos. Secondly, it denotes the fundamental process of salvation history, that is, the election and separation of pure from impure, and therefore the inauguration of the history of God's dealings with men. Thus begins the spiritual creation, the creation of the covenant, without which the created cosmos would be an empty shell. Creation and history, creation, history, and worship are in a relationship of reciprocity. Creation looks toward the covenant, but the covenant completes creation and does not simply exist along with it. Now if worship, rightly understood, is the soul of the covenant, then it not only saves mankind but is also meant to draw the whole of reality into communion with God.

The Jewish-Christian liturgy is also cosmic. That is why it incorporates the matter into its celebration (Ratzinger, 2001). Liturgy has a cosmic, and not just a group

character. Christ is like Melchizedek, the priest of a cosmic liturgy (De Gaal, 2010). It embraces heaven and earth. It sings with the angels and the saints, with the expectant depths of the universe; it keeps silence, and redeems the earth. The importance of music in biblical religion is shown very simply by the fact that the verb “to sing” (with related words such as “song”, and so forth) is one of the most commonly used words in the Bible. It occurs 309 times in the Old Testament and thirty-six in the New. When man comes into contact with God, mere speech is not enough. Areas of his existence are awakened that spontaneously turn into song. Indeed, man’s own being is insufficient for what he has to express, and so he invites the whole of creation to become a song with him: “Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds” (Ps 57[56]:8f.) (Ratzinger, 2008b). The Logos is, in fact, the great artist in whom all the oeuvre d’art, the beauty of the universe, is found. To sing together with the universe means to follow the way of the Logos, who has primacy over the Ethos—the contrary voids Christianity of all its essence (Guardini, 1998).

The liturgy is much bigger than the universe. In it, all creation adores God. In this way, for Maximus the Confessor, theology becomes the Cosmic liturgy (Von Balthasa, 2003). In the view of Teilhard de Chardin, the orientation of the movement of the cosmos is provided by the Eucharist, which “anticipates its goal and at the same time urges on it” (Ratzinger, 2008b). Moreover, the Transubstantiation is the anticipation of the perfection of the cosmos (De Gaal, 2010). The time is, in fact, a cosmic reality. In the liturgy, the space becomes time, and the time enters the space; history and cosmos interpenetrate, giving witness to Christ (Ratzinger, 2001). At any rate, Ratzinger stresses:

The Lord’s exaltation gives rise to the new unity of God with man, and hence to heaven. The perfecting of the Lord’s body in the pleroma [fullness] of the ‘whole Christ’ brings heaven to its true cosmic completion . . . the individual’s salvation is whole and entire only when the salvation of the cosmos and all the elect has come to full fruition. For the redeemed are not simply adjacent to each other in heaven. Rather, in their being together as the one Christ, they are in heaven (De Gaal, 2010).

3.3. Earthly and Heavenly Liturgy

In the liturgy, the entire public worship of God is the act of the Mystical Body of Christ. Furthermore, the liturgy is an action of the *communio sanctorum* which no other action of the Church can equal (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7). The Mystical Body of Christ consists of three levels: the Church Militant (*ecclesia militans*) on earth, the Church Suffering (*ecclesia patiens*) in Purgatory and the Church Triumphant (*ecclesia triumphans*) reigning in heaven. All three are part of the same Body, with Christ as its head, and each lives in unity of love and charity expressed in the liturgical celebration (cf. Eph 4:16). They all sing the same hymn

of glory to God. The liturgy is not in the world; it is the world that is in the liturgy. The heavenly liturgy surrounds the world, and the liturgy of the earth participates in it (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 48-49).

The communion of the Mystical Body of Christ is made up of the exiles on earth, those who have died and are purified, and those who are in glory, seeing God as He is. All are bound together in ties of charity of God and neighbour. Reciprocal giving and receiving exist between all the members of this Body, but there are specific tasks given to each in order to sing glory to God. Hence, through the liturgy, we become co-redeemers. This charity of the faithful on earth not only encompasses one another but also extends to the suffering souls in Purgatory. Throughout its history, the Church has taught that the temporal punishments of those undergoing purification in Purgatory can be alleviated by their brothers and sisters who continue to fight against the forces of evil on earth. In this way, the bond of love existing between Christians is strengthened. The faithful on earth also express their need for divine assistance by invoking the powerful intercession of the saints reigning in heaven. As prayers ascend to the throne of glory, so at the behest of God, blessings continually flow in the other direction, in an unbroken stream of grace and peace linking time and eternity. It is thus evident that liturgy unites the Church in heaven and on earth (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 49-50). The Roman Canon states it by even asking the angels to carry the Church's offering to the heavenly altar (Dalmais, 1987).

In the celebration of the liturgy, the People of God move towards the Lord. Every liturgical celebration is a step to his coming. The liturgy is the anticipation of the *parousia*, "the already entering our not yet" (Ratzinger, 2008b), the hour of the Lord, the perfection of the Church. In the liturgy, the things which we are waiting for are present; the expectation is already given (Benedict XVI, 2007b). The heavenly liturgy is described through many images given in the Revelation of John. The Risen Lord is surrounded by the four creatures and the host of singing angels. They express a joy which cannot be taken away. To celebrate liturgy is to live in the manner of the angels, which consists in worshipping. In the liturgy, we are in communion with the angels, and we sing what is from them. It is not only the clergy who celebrate the liturgy, but the whole Church. If the earthly Church and the heavenly Church form one Church, the clergy and the laity of the earthly Church certainly form one Church. The liturgy is thus both celestial and terrestrial. The heavenly liturgy precedes the earthly. The latter is the liturgy because of the former, which is the greater reality (De Gaal, 2010).

The assembly is given the means to realise the fullness of their humanity and their ultimate *telos* (Olver, 2017). Ratzinger agrees with Saint Benedict, who pinpoints that "let us reflect upon how we should be in the presence of God and the angels, and when we sing let us stand in such a way that our hearts are in tune with our voices—*mens nostra concordat voci nostrae*" (Ratzinger, 2001). Liturgy is the epiphany of the Church and the manifestation of salvation in Christ (Martimort, 1987). This excerpt of the Second Vatican Council cannot be bypassed

without harming the truth:

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle (cf. Rev 21:2; Col 3:1; Heb 8:2); we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory (cf. Phil 3:20; Col 3:4) (*Sacro-sanctum Concilium* 8).

4. The Liturgy of Christ in History

4.1. The Dawn of History

The Christian life has a transitory character. The object of the hope of the people of God throughout the ages is not yet totally reached. The combination of this idea and the promises of the Old Testament helps to realize that this process is not a direct transition from the Old to the New Testament. It is a process made of three stages: shadow, image, and reality. The nature of the *parousia* can be clarified based on Ratzinger's view. The Church of the New Testament constitutes the image of the future life. It is the dawn of history, where the already and the not yet meet; darkness and light are intermingled. The sun rose but has not yet reached the zenith. It is between the shadow and reality (Ratzinger, 2008b). This is the meaning of what Paul says to the Romans: "The night is far gone; the day is near" (Rom. 13:12a). It leads to the definitive and ultimate reality that has already begun in Christ (Ratzinger, 2001).

Because the sacrifice has become a gift, the body offered and the blood poured by love have been, by the resurrection, in the eternity of love. All the theology of the liturgy is grounded on the Cross and the Resurrection, out of which the liturgical celebration is empty. "Without the Cross and the Resurrection, Christian worship is null and void, and a theology of liturgy that omitted any reference to them would really just be talking about an empty game" (Ratzinger, 2008b). That is what the Hebrew word "*semel*" or the Greek word "*ephapax*" means. These two events happened once and for all. At this junction, all the Fathers, Joachim, the Spiritual Friars, the Catholics and the Lutherans of the 1950s agree. A simple analysis will state that these events belong to the past. Such understanding keeps these events totally out of reach (Ratzinger, 2008b):

The crucifixion of Christ, his death on the Cross, and, in another way, the act of his Resurrection from the grave, which bestows incorruptibility on the corruptible, are historical events that happen just once and as such belong to the past. The word *semel* (*ephapax*), "once for all", which the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes so vigorously in contrast to the multitude of repeated sacrifices in the Old Covenant, is strictly applicable to them. But if they were no

more than facts in the past, like all the dates we learn in history books, then there could be nothing contemporary about them. In the end they would remain beyond our reach. However, the exterior act of being crucified is accompanied by an interior act of being self-giving (the Body is “given for you”). “No one takes [my life] from me,” says the Lord in St. John’s Gospel, “but I lay it down of my own accord” (10:18). This act of giving is in no way just a spiritual act that takes up the bodily into itself, that embraces the whole man; indeed, it is at the same time an act of the Son... The real interior act, though it does not exist without the exterior, transcends time, but since it comes from time, time can again and again be brought into it. That is how we can become contemporary with the past events of salvation.

They are constantly present and are made actual in the liturgy. The exterior act of the crucifixion is limited in time, while the interior act surpasses time. The time is absorbed in what goes beyond time. However, all are connected to history. What has been done at a certain moment in time encompasses all the time: past, present, and future. Therefore, the death of Christ embraces all those for whom he has offered his life (Ratzinger, 2001). The time and the eternity (Von Balthasar, 1955), the mortal and the immortal, coexist in him (Ratzinger, 2001). He is then the connection between time and eternity. This relation is corporal and real in the Incarnated Logos. The eternity of God encompasses time, surpasses it, and is accessible through time (Ratzinger, 2001). One aspect should be clear: “In myth, the logos goes beyond history, and the mythical event is a supra-story that takes place in a super-human realm. The mystery of Christ makes a claim that must necessarily be upheld on the historical level” (Ratzinger, 1982).

Raised from the dead, Christ appears as the Savior, the one who crossed death and the heavens, the one who surpassed the time and elevated it to eternity. In this perspective, Danielou’s opinion is helpful: Christ reveals Himself as the *telos*, the end of history, and not its term (Durand, 2014). However, in Jean Danielou, *telos* is translated by *terme* (term) and *peras* by *fin* (end). He supports that Christ by the hypostatic union appeared as “le terme (*telos*) absolu de l’histoire” (the absolute term of history). He is, in his eyes, the absolute *telos* of a continuous history. In Christ, the history of salvation was brought to an inaugural end: coming from God, he descended into the fragility of our flesh, the mortal flesh of sin, then he returned to the Father, clothed in the same flesh, saved and glorified.

4.2. The Today of Christ

In the opinion of Bernard de Clairvaux, *semel* is equivalent to *semper*, and *ephapax* to *aionios*. The perpetual takes place in the “only once.” The letter to the Hebrews emphasises the uniqueness of the events in salvation history. From this relation comes the notion of the “today of Christ” that will last to the end of ages (Heb 4:7). This day embraces the totality of the time of the Church, which is between the shadow and the reality:

“Today” embraces the whole time of the Church. And so in the Christian liturgy we not only receive something from the past but become contemporaries with what lies at the foundation of that liturgy. Here is the real heart and true grandeur of the celebration of the Eucharist, which is more, much more than a meal. In the Eucharist we are caught up and made contemporary with the Paschal Mystery of Christ, in his passing from the tabernacle of the transitory to the presence and sight of God (Ratzinger, 2008b).

As Jews lived in tension of the exodus anamnesis and the expectation of the Day of the Lord, Christians now live in the in-between times of the first and second coming. This is the eschatological tension of an “already fulfilled” and “not yet consummated” aspects that exist within a redemptive-historical framework (Benedict XVI, 2007b). The concept of the “now” and the “not yet,” or “inaugurated eschatology,” which posits that the future is yet to be fulfilled, is a widely accepted paradigm for understanding the eschatology of the New Testament. Christ has come in history and will do so again. It is in this way that the liturgy makes present the events of the Cross and the Resurrection, and waits for the fulfilment of history in the *parousia*. The liturgical period embraces all the time from Christ’s Ascension to the Second Coming (De Gaal, 2010).

It is the time of the sacraments (sacramental time). The sacraments are historical events, like the Christ-Event. They are the extension of the Good News, of facts and events of the gospel, which are made present here and now. The liturgy orients the people of God towards this new time, towards the new world, where shadows and images are replaced by the definitive union of the Creator and His creature. (Ratzinger, 2001). The liturgical people of this period are contemporary to Christ and participate in his Passover (Von Balathasar, 1955). The liturgy is truly more than a meal. There, the *semel* is not a past event, but the force that animates the successive presents; past, present, and future interpenetrate. The eschaton is made present, and eternity is touched. Liturgy is thus an end in itself. It is an anticipation of the life to come and the heavenly liturgy. The sacrifice of Christ will be over when the whole world will become the true city of love and “God all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The today is the great process leading the whole world to the city of the wedding of God and the world, Creator and creature, matter and spirit, history and universe. The promise of seeing God “as He is” will be fulfilled (1 John 3:2). We can now understand why Bonaventure rejected the philosophical theory of the eternal circle (Ratzinger, 1971). Every saved person will recognise himself in the full gaze of Christ (Durand, 2014). The liturgy is then the perfect fulfilment of the event of Golgotha. Just as the priests of the time were the shadows of Christ, today the *typoi* of Christ prefigure the age of reality. It is the centre of the redemption process—the day when Christ dwells among us (Ratzinger, 2001).

The Church makes Christ present at the transubstantiation. The real liturgical level is revealed in the actions and words of Jesus during the Last Supper. They constitute the core of Christian worship and are built on the synagogue and Temple liturgies. This level is meaningful only when it relates to what really happens,

to reality that is substantially present. The liturgy is an anticipation of what is to come. In the liturgical celebration, the past, present, and future penetrate one another. It is founded on Jesus, who, by His Incarnation, enters into the mystery of God (Ratzinger, 2008a). The Eucharistic time of Christ is limited for the individual by his death, and for the Church, by the final Judgment. Then Christ will no longer present himself under the sacramental form proper for “the today” (Von Balthasar, 1955). The resurrection of Christ is presented as the first and decisive act of the last day (Danielou, 1958). As long as the essence of the liturgy and the *eschaton* are concerned, with keen perception, Ratzinger emphasizes:

The essence of the Liturgy is, finally, summarised in the prayer which St Paul (1 Co 16:22) and Didache (10:6) have handed down to us: “Maran atha—our Lord is there—Lord, come!” from now on, the Parousia is accomplished in the Liturgy, but that is so precisely because it teaches us to cry: “Come, Lord Jesus,” while reaching out towards the Lord who is coming. It always brings us to hear His reply yet again and to experience its truth: “yes, I am coming soon” (Apoc. 22:17, 20) (Ratzinger, 2008b).

4.3. The Liturgy of the Cross

“The today” is in fact the time of the liturgy of the Cross through which the earthly time enters the present of Christ; the time is brought back in the hands of God. Ratzinger points it out marvelously:

The Synoptic Gospels explicitly portray Jesus’ death on the Cross as a cosmic and liturgical event: the sun is darkened, the veil of the Temple is torn in two, the earth quakes, the dead rise again. Even more important than the cosmic sign is an act of faith: the Roman centurion... in his consternation over all that he sees taking place, acknowledges Jesus as God’s Son: “Truly, this man was the Son of God” (Mk 15:39) (Ratzinger, 2011).

On this note, the theology of the letter to the Hebrews is rich. The death of Jesus on the Cross is presented as a ritual. Christ’s death, as Eucharist, “was in reality the one and only liturgy of the world... in which Jesus stepped... publicly, before the eyes of the world, through the curtain of death into the real temple... before the face of God himself, in order to offer... himself (Heb 9:11ff)” (De Gaal, 2010). It is compared to the Day of Atonement. Jesus is the Eternal Priesthood and Eternal Sacrifice (Heb 5:11-10:39). His priesthood is superior to that of Melchizedek and the Levites. The event of the Cross is the Sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:11-14), just as the high priest had the right to access the Holy of Holies. Similarly, Jesus’ life, offered as a sacrifice, has the right to enter the heavenly sanctuary. Jesus’ self-offering is a heavenly reality, offered through the eternal Spirit. It is a definitive and final sacrifice. It is not repeated, unlike the Day of Atonement sacrifices of the high priest (Bourke, 1996). The Cross is indeed worship, exaltation, and makes present the Resurrection. From the Cross, Jesus draws everything to himself and carries the entire creation and humanity into eternity. Incarnation finds its

meaning only in the Cross and resurrection. On the Cross, the definitive Sacrifice was offered. Since His bitter sufferings constitute the principal mystery of our redemption, it is only fitting that the Catholic faith should give it the greatest prominence. This mystery is the very center of divine worship since the Mass represents and renews it every day and since all the sacraments are most closely united with the cross” (Pius XII, 1967). Ratzinger’s note on this view is worth quoting:

In the Cross and Resurrection, the Incarnation of the Word becomes the verbalization of the flesh. These two pervade each other. The incarnation is not taken back; it only becomes final, so to speak, at the moment the movement is reversed. The flesh becomes logicized, but precisely this process of the flesh becoming word produces a new unity of all reality, which was obviously so important to God that he let it cost him his Son on the Cross (Ratzinger, 2008b).

4.4. The Kairos of History

The historical existence of Christ is the immediate norm of every individual’s historical existence. Everything began with him, and he brought the fire of the new beginning (Guardini, 2002). This norm is actual at each instant. The forty days of the Risen Jesus belong to the earthly as well as to the eternal time. The Cross is the anticipation of the judgment, and these forty days are the anticipation of the eternity beyond the judgment (Ratzinger, 2011). Obviously, the Resurrected and his apostolic witnesses lived at the same time. It is about the *nunc stans* in history, the eternal in time, the eternal temporalized and the temporal eternalised. This period connects the time of the earthly Jesus to the time of the Church. The hidden state is revealed, the sensible becomes spiritual, and the indirect becomes direct; what was done privately is done publicly (Von Balthasar, 1955).

The ascension is not the end of this temporality, but a sign of the end of the earthly life of Jesus. This presence of Christ among his disciples constitutes the ground of all the modalities of the presence of Christ in the “today”: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28: 20b) (Von Balthasar, 1955). In the episode of Emmaus, he explains the Scripture in two directions: from the promise to the fulfilment, and from the fulfilment to the promise (Luke 24: 25-27, 44-46). Thus, as *the eschaton of history, he is present at its centre and in its historical kairos*. He is present at the midpoint between God and creation, heaven and earth, the new age and the old, the Church and the world, and reveals the meaning of each *kairos*. The *kairos* of the history of salvation is in Him (1 Cor 6:2). At this point, if we consider the view of Rupert of Deutz, Joachim of Fiore and the Spirituals, all this wonderful teaching will be destroyed. Ratzinger was thus correct to follow Bonaventure. This *Kairos*, as the supreme climax of revelation, is celebrated in the liturgy. That is why Guardini thinks that “the liturgy, as *lex orandi*, is according to the old proverb, the law of faith—the *lex credendi*—as well. It is the treasure-house of the thought of Revelation” (Guardini, 1998).

Considering the Cross as the throne of Christ’s kingship, the seat of the immor-

tal King, we can see that it is then the *kairos* of history and cosmos. It is on the Cross where the new exodus ends and is sealed, the new and eternal kingship. *Regnavit a lingo Deus* (1Pet. 3: 19; Ratzinger, 2008a) sang the ancient Church. God reigns from the wood of the cross. We understand why the Church reads an excerpt of the Passion in the solemnity of Christ the King.

Upon closer examination, I have identified a significant misunderstanding regarding the cosmic and historical aspects of liturgy, which contributes to the anthropocentric practices I critique in my paper. This misunderstanding manifests in several ways. When liturgy focuses exclusively on human experiences and interpretations, the broader cosmic context is often overlooked. This reduction of liturgy to mere human-centered rituals creates an environment where the divine and cosmic order are overlooked. Consequently, worship becomes a way to fulfill personal or community needs rather than a genuine response to the divine. Moreover, an anthropocentric approach can lead to the commodification of worship, where the emphasis is placed on the consumer aspect of religious rituals, in the name of “active participation” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 28-30). This means the focus is on the external feelings and attitudes of the faithful. Sometimes, “active participation” (Ratzinger, 2001) in the liturgy is reduced to an increased “busy” role-playing in the liturgy, or turning the Mass into a “drama” with a cast of thousands or into a pub club (Mukadi, 2015).

This shift undermines the communal and cosmic elements of worship, leading to a diminished reverence for the divine. In 2015, I expressed my strong opposition to this trend in my article titled “Liturgy: God’s Own Work.” I stated, “Neither individual devotions nor personal feelings can ever replace the liturgy” (Mukadi, 2015). Furthermore, in order that the sacred liturgy may produce its full effect, the faithful must come to it with proper dispositions, that their convictions match their words, and that they cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11). I had already underscored the danger of an anthropocentric apprehension of the liturgy, suggesting that the liturgy must be viewed as something more profound than merely human external feelings (Mukadi, 2013). This results in leadership, worship styles, and communal engagement being overly centered on human desires and experiences, rather than fostering a holistic understanding of the divine relationship within the cosmos. To correct this attitude, there is a need for a cosmic and historical perspective on liturgy. If we fail to uphold this principle, the liturgy risks becoming mere entertainment rather than a profound encounter with the sacred.

This leads me to affirm in the footsteps of Saint Augustine that liturgy is an action of the Body of Christ in its entirety, i.e., the whole Christ (*Christus totus*). Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church, “the sacrament of unity” (Mukadi, 2015).

5. The Question of the Liturgy Today

It has been noted that liturgy is first the action of God to which man participates.

From the Bull Calf Narrative, we realise how the Hebrews wanted to subject God to human will. Unknowingly, their worship became anthropocentric. This episode serves as a significant tool for examining the liturgy in practice today. The Christian liturgy is Christ-centred. All the human words and gestures must be oriented to him. However, it appears that sometimes this incident of Exodus 32 is repeated in our celebrations. It is thus a subtle apostasy, too. Practically, the liturgy is in profound disintegration and crisis, as Ratzinger observed before he wrote “The Spirit of the Liturgy”, and Cardinal Sarah mentions it (<https://collegeofcardinalsreport.com/cardinals/robert-sarah/> [accessed on 15.08.2025]; <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/03/31/cardinal-saraha-address-on-the-10th-anniversary-of-summorum-pontificum/> [accessed on 15.08.25]).

Cardinal Robert Sarah, the Vatican’s liturgical chief, has spoken of a “serious, profound crisis” in the liturgy and the Church since the Second Vatican Council. In a message to a liturgical conference in Herzogenrath, Germany... Cardinal Sarah praised Vatican II’s document on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. But he said the Council had been followed by a “serious crisis of faith, not only at the level of the Christian faithful but also and especially among many priests and bishops”. The cardinal, who is Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, said the “crisis” was particularly visible in the way the Mass has been understood and celebrated. He argued that many Catholics had neglected “sacred silence”, and gestures such as kneeling which express reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. They had also forgotten that the Eucharist is a sacrifice, “identical to the act performed once and for all by Jesus Christ, making present the Sacrifice of the Cross in a non-bloody manner”. He added that the Church had experienced “devastation, destruction and wars” not only in the liturgy, but also in doctrine, morals and Church discipline. “More and more voices of high-ranking prelates stubbornly affirm obvious doctrinal, moral and liturgical errors that have been condemned a hundred times, and work to demolish the little faith remaining in the people of God,” he said.”

The Priests and other faithful look for their satisfaction rather than God’s glory and man’s salvation. The assembly “is only celebrating itself without its being worthwhile to do so”

(<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=196>

[accessed on 28.01.21]. Liturgy has become man-centred. Human ego is given primordial rank and priority. It is observed in one way or another in the homilies and music. The homily is an authentic tool of evangelisation. It should be liturgical, biblical, and accommodated to the listeners. It is necessary, according to Paul VI, for the preacher to know and put to good use the exigencies and the possibilities of the homily, so that it can acquire all its pastoral effectiveness (Paul VI, 1975 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: 43). The Second Vatican Council not only includes the homily in the liturgical rubrics but insists on its scriptural and mystagogical character

(*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 24. 35. 52).

The Resurrection of Christ is for Christians what, *mutatis mutandis*, the event of the Red Sea is for Israel. It is the main reason for praising God and the basic theme of their songs (Ratzinger, 2008b). Christian music should always be connected to the *Logos*. The more it is adapted to the laws of the universe, the more wonderful and beautiful it will be. In the liturgy, the *ars celebrandi* will always be connected to the *actuosa participatio*. Thus, Benedict XVI was not wrong to say that “the best catechesis on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*: 64). Liturgy is a reality lived. Four principles are necessary to live this liturgy: objectivity, distinction, necessity, and discretion (Gitton, 2003). It is on this basis that Ratzinger quoted Elisabeth Bickl (Ratzinger, 2008b):

Liturgy is not some officially prescribed ritual but a concrete celebration, fashioned as an authentic expression of the celebrating community, with the minimum of external control. Liturgy is not a specifically ecclesiastical cult with its own spirituality; to be performed in an objective manner... The priest’s missal is his guidebook for his particular role... and in a similar way, Gotteslob [the congregational music book] is the congregation’s guidebook. Liturgy is created in a particular place at a particular time; this emphasizes the role of the community... Since the Council, a higher value has been placed on the congregation’s singing. No longer does the reality exist behind the singing: what is sung is the reality.

The focus is on maintenance, finances, and management rather than the mysteries of faith and the norms of Christian living, on pleasure rather than conversion, on politics rather than faith, on stories rather than Scripture, and on desire rather than sacrificial worship. The movement is reversed; it is man who takes the initiative, and God participates. This is a pagan liturgy whereby human beings manipulate gods. The liturgy is not a place where cultures are manifested, but rather where they are redeemed. These observations of Cardinal Robert Sarah at the *Sacra Liturgia* conference in London in 2016 are noteworthy (Sarah, 2016) (<https://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2016/07/cardinal-saraha-inaugural-address-at.htm> [accessed 01.08.2025]):

It is true that the vernacular has a positive place in the liturgy. The Fathers were seeking this, not authorising the protestantization of the Sacred Liturgy or agreeing to it being subjected to a false inculturation. I am an African. Let me say clearly: the liturgy is not the place to promote my culture. Rather, it is the place where my culture is baptised, where my culture is taken up into the divine. Through the Church’s liturgy (which missionaries have carried throughout the world) God speaks to us, He changes us and enables us to partake in His divine life. When someone becomes a Christian, when someone enters into full communion with the Catholic Church, they receive something more, something which changes them. Certainly, cultures and other Christians bring gifts with them into the Church—the liturgy of the Ordinar-

iates of Anglicans now in full communion with the Church is a beautiful example of this. But they bring these gifts with humility, and the Church in her maternal wisdom makes use of them as she judges appropriate. Nevertheless, it seems incumbent to be very clear on what we mean by inculturation. If we truly understand the meaning of the term as an insight into the mystery of Jesus Christ, then we have the key to inculturation, which is not a quest nor a claim for the legitimacy of Africanization nor Latin Americanization nor Asianization in substitution of a Westernization of Christianity. Inculturation is neither a canonization of a local culture nor a settling into this culture at the risk of making it absolute. Inculturation is an irruption and an epiphany of the Lord in the depths of our being... It is not essentially realized in the use of local languages, instruments and Latin American music, African dances or African or Asian rituals and symbols in the liturgy and the sacraments... Please permit me to mention some other small ways which can also contribute to a more faithful implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. One is that we must sing the liturgy, singing the liturgical texts with respect for the Church's liturgical traditions and rejoicing in the treasury of sacred music that is ours, most especially the music proper to the Roman Rite, such as Gregorian chant.

From these excerpts, we learn that inculturation should not be confused with a complex of cultural superiority or inferiority, or the will to power. However, every inculturation must follow the two principles of compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church (John Paul II, 1990). In this context, I believe it is essential to acknowledge the Congolese (DRC) bishops who have successfully preserved Roman Rite elements in the Zairian Rite. The liturgy is the privileged place for the Scripture. We must be utterly clear about the nature of Catholic worship if we are to read the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy correctly and if we are to implement it faithfully. The Council did not produce an anthropocentric liturgy. Rather, the Conciliar Fathers sought to find ways in which Christ's faithful could draw ever more deeply from the foremost and indispensable fount to acquire the true Christian spirit for their own salvation and that of all men and women.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Christian liturgy represents a profound integration of cosmic and historical dimensions, creating a dynamic interaction that neither separates nor confuses these realms. It unfolds within specific temporal and spatial contexts, serving to sanctify and unite the cosmos with history. The significance of this liturgical celebration becomes fully apparent only when it is acknowledged as intricately connected to both aspects. The roots of history, as perceived through a priestly narrative, are firmly established in the act of creation, characterized by enduring positive beginnings. According to Ratzinger, the act of liturgy serves as a prefiguration of the *parousia*, illustrating a profound relationship between the

earthly and the divine, thereby drawing humanity into a communal fullness that encapsulates a reality where the eschaton transforms into *kairos*.

Liturgy is built upon the bedrock of fulfilled promises and lived hopes, guiding the religious journey throughout human history. In this context, Christ emerges as both the focal point and culmination of history, continuously present within the liturgical celebration, which remains a source of renewal. This understanding bridges into further discussions on liturgy as an anticipation of the *parousia*, the future life, and the ultimate realization of God being all in all. Ratzinger posits that the history and nature of the *parousia* find their essential explanation within the liturgy, viewed as the pinnacle of Church activities. In liturgical practice, Christ is adored as the centre of the moment, the fulcrum of history, taking on the role of the *Kairos of kairos*.

Through liturgy, God engages in dialogue with humanity, embodying both the divine logos and the means of dialogue—*dia-logos*. Ratzinger portrays God as the speaker, while humanity is portrayed as the listener, fostering a deep communicative relationship. The initiative rests with the divine, whereas human participation is welcoming and responsive. This asymmetrical dialogue reflects the very nature of the Trinity, where the Father holds priority in speech, glorifying God while sanctifying humanity. This dynamic encapsulates liturgy's ultimate goal: to manifest Christian faith and freedom at their highest expression.

Throughout this exploration, it became evident that scriptural exegesis inherently depends on historical context. Historical analysis infuses scripture with meaning, while the past continually points toward prophetic days to come. Liturgy is established as the foundation for theological pursuits, with the historical Jesus representing the apex of creation and history—a culmination that is transcended in the Risen Lord. The intertwining of eschaton and *kairos*, with the telos as the center, signifies the unity of Creator and creature, Author and work, earth and heaven, flesh and spirit, without implying confusion among them.

Jesus, sustaining all of history, is present not only in the past but also today and into eternity, as affirmed in the rite of the Paschal Candle. The theology of history becomes essentially liturgical, suggesting that many controversies surrounding the understanding of *parousia* or theological history stem from approaches that do not draw from liturgical roots. The Christian liturgy, centered on the Logos-Liturgy, calls for profound devotion and reverence, a sentiment echoed by Ratzinger: "Nothing is to be preferred to the liturgy." Pope Francis further underscores this by cautioning that "a Christianity without a liturgy would be a Christianity without Christ, without the complete understanding of Christ."

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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