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books in review

THOMAS STORCK

MAKING SENSE OF OUR LITURGICAL MORASS

Tradition & Sanity: Conversations & Dialogues of a Postconciliar Exile. By Peter A. Kwasniewski. *Angelico Press*. 213 pages. \$17.95.

Peter Kwasniewski, formerly a professor at Wyoming Catholic College, has produced a third collection of short pieces dealing with the Church and her liturgy. I reviewed the previous two, *Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis* and *Noble Beauty, Transcendent Holiness*, in these pages (June 2015

Thomas Storck has written widely on Catholic social teaching, Catholic culture, and related topics for many years. His most recent book is *An Economics of Justice & Charity: Catholic Social Teaching, Its Development and Contemporary Relevance* (*Angelico Press*, 2017). An archive of his writings can be found at www.thomasstorck.org.

and April 2018, respectively). Unlike those two, which were collections of essays, the present work consists mainly of dialogues, interviews, and conversations. In using the dialogue form, fictional conversations that explore some question or another, the author makes use of a literary form popular from antiquity through the 18th century, and with occasional use more recently.

Tradition & Sanity touches on different aspects of the postconciliar liturgical and doctrinal morass. The three contributions I found most interesting and most important are an interview with Roseanne Sullivan, published originally in *The Latin Mass* magazine; a dialogue on the question of the papacy and tradition; and a conversation that took place in Vienna in April 2017 between Kwasniewski, Austrian philosopher Thomas Stark, and Pater Edmund Waldstein, O. Cist., moderated by Wolfram Schrems.

In the first of these three, Kwasniewski makes the crucial

point that in matters liturgical, “we are debtors to our tradition, we are beholden to our heritage.” This is important precisely because mankind — existing in history, the history of each individual person and of our whole culture and of the whole human race — defines itself through a multitude of actions that take place in time. These actions have shaped us, individually and collectively. We have hardly any meaning without them. The man who attempts to cut himself off from all previous history and culture will not only be unsuccessful, he will make of himself a freak among his fellows. This is likewise the case for collectivities such as cultures, and pre-eminently for the Church herself, the rich history of which can be repudiated or ignored only by those content with a shallow “pop” Catholicism.

An important key for understanding Kwasniewski’s personal viewpoint is revealed in his initial encounter with the Traditional Latin Mass. “At Thomas Aquinas

College I was introduced to the old Mass and fell in love with it, ‘love at first sight,’” he writes. “It came crashing in on my consciousness as something radically other, glowing with divine transcendence, startling in its complete lack of accommodation to modernity or to me. It did not pander to me but threw down the gauntlet and expected me to submit.”

My experience with the traditional liturgy, while not so striking, has also been overwhelmingly positive, so that I likewise have come to revere it as a spiritual, liturgical, cultural, and historical treasure. I constantly puzzle why more Catholics are not immediately captivated by its richness. But it is a fact that, as Roseanne Sullivan says, “I and others have noted that the Extraordinary Form hasn’t achieved much acceptance among people who are attached to the Ordinary Form. Even when it’s available, it is often sparsely attended.” In reply, Kwasniewski notes that Pope Benedict XVI, in his letter to bishops that accompanied *Summorum Pontificum* (2007), opined that “use of the old Missal presupposes a certain degree of liturgical formation and some knowledge of the Latin language,” and “neither of these is found often.” But he is hopeful, nevertheless, that if the not-infrequent and sometimes subtle opposition to the traditional Mass exercised by many bishops and chancery officials ceased, “we would be looking at a far different picture.”

While Kwasniewski’s and my own introductions to the old liturgy were positive, I know of serious Catholics who have encountered that liturgy mostly or

only in the form of hastily and ill-said low Masses, generally in flagrant violation of the rubrics. While not necessarily comfortable with the banality of the vernacular *Novus Ordo* Mass, or Ordinary Form, and certainly not with its abuses, for a variety of reasons these Catholics do not embrace a return to the traditional liturgy. While I do not agree with their position, they can hardly be written off as unserious or inferior on that account — still less as barely Catholic at all, as some of the more extreme champions of the old Mass do.

I would rejoice were the traditional form of the liturgy restored throughout the Latin Church, but while we can pray for that happy day, in the meantime Catholics must live with the realities of the situation. Those of us who see an inherent superiority in the old liturgy, whether or not we would label ourselves *traditionalist*, must avoid seeming to be an *ecclesia in Ecclesia* — a church within the Church — while Catholics who, for whatever reason, prefer to attend the *Novus Ordo* should look beyond stereotypes and realize that those who attend the traditional liturgy are a diverse group, and that the extremists have no warrant to speak for all of us.

The second compelling feature of *Tradition & Sanity* is a dialogue between two fictional monks, Brother Barsanuphius and Brother Romuald. Here the intellectual perplexities that confront Catholics concerned about the state of the Church are clearly posed. Barsanuphius puts it thus: “My problem comes down to the relationship between the ‘conservative’ instinct of submitting to

the pope, and the ‘traditionalist’ instinct of taking tradition as a safe guide and making a yardstick of it.” But there are problems with both of these approaches. He continues:

I see, on the one hand, that the instinct of revering the pope and going along with his teaching is healthy, but on the other hand, I know enough Church history to see that this is not foolproof. And besides, what is meant by “the pope’s teaching” is far from simple, since it is not a uniform body of teaching but comes in various forms and degrees of authority.

What about tradition? “Some people see ‘tradition’ as an intellectual construct that can never be determinate,” Barsanuphius continues, “so appealing to it encourages, they think, an almost Protestant spirit of ‘private judgment.’” But if “what is meant by ‘the pope’s teaching’ is far from simple, since it is not a uniform body of teaching,” this can be said a hundred times over for something as vast and diverse as tradition. The solution, suggests Br. Romuald, is that “there is a genuine *via media* that holds to the real primacy of the pope as well as to the normative standing of the tradition.”

On questions of doctrine, I think things are fairly evident. In recent decades, the Church has made it abundantly clear what rule or standard we must use in determining the doctrinal status of ecclesiastical statements. The First Vatican Council taught that “all those things are to be believed with divine and Catholic faith

which are contained in the Word of God, written or handed down, and which the Church, either by a solemn judgment or by her ordinary and universal teaching [*magisterium*], proposes for belief as having been divinely revealed.” But how are we to distinguish the Church’s “ordinary and universal teaching” amid the numerous documents and utterances of popes and bishops? Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* notes that we can distinguish the degree of authority of papal or episcopal statements “either by the character of the documents in question, or by the frequency with which a certain doctrine is proposed, or by the manner in which the doctrine is formulated” (no. 25). Thus, letters, sermons, or one-time assertions of questionable meaning would almost always be of lesser authority, not to mention statements that appear to contradict doctrines proposed in the past with solemn authority.

But what about merely administrative or disciplinary acts of the popes, such as, in particular, the imposition of the *Novus Ordo* by Pope St. Paul VI in 1969? I see no problem in calling this a huge mistake, an utter misreading of the signs of the times, and a major blow to the Church’s life and health. But what about earlier changes in the Church’s liturgy?

Kwasniewski regards Pope Pius XII’s alterations to the Triduum ceremonies as “a tragic rupture.” There are those who say the same thing about the changes Pope St. Pius X made to the Breviary. Are these attitudes examples of Protestant private judgment, or worse, mere liturgical taste? Or are they an appeal to a sound principle — namely, that the liturgy must always develop organically and not by fits and starts, according to the preconceived notions of reformers?

I do not have any sure answers to these questions and concerns, but Kwasniewski is to be commended for raising them, even if not everyone will agree on the answers. And they *are* important questions, essential even, as the Church moves into the third millennium of her life. We need a clearer understanding of the Church’s necessary relationship with her past and her tradition (or traditions, if you will) that will help guide us along the undoubtedly difficult and uncharted road ahead.

These same questions arise in a conversation between Kwasniewski, Stark, and Pater Waldstein. Kwasniewski asserts, early in the conversation, that “when ever you depart from tradition, from what’s handed down, then you will end up in heresy.” He says this in explaining the views

of St. Vincent of Lérins toward development and change in the Church. He notes that St. Vincent contrasted growth with change, or *mutatio*. “*Mutatio*, for him, is when one thing mutates into another and becomes a different essence. And he says for the Catholic religion to do that, that’s what heresy is — a mutation rather than a growth.”

I think that everyone could agree with this in a general sense, but difficulties arise in its application to specifics. For example, for several centuries, Rome resisted the insertion of the *Filioque* into the Nicene Creed. Rome’s eventual acceptance of this addition is regarded by the Eastern Orthodox as an example of unwarranted change. Similarly, at the time of Vatican I, there were those who saw the proposed decrees regarding papal authority and infallibility as innovations. We can safely and assuredly say that both criticisms are wrong, but we can do so only because we can appeal to the Church, which has spoken on both these matters. But before the Church speaks authoritatively, there can be legitimate debate about a matter, and who can then say with assurance what is an example of growth and what is change, or *mutatio*? This would seem to apply even more to questions of discipline or Church government, such as we have in the liturgy. I raise these matters not so much in opposition to the author’s thesis but in order to show that, in my opinion, we have not yet hashed through these questions sufficiently, and confident assertions are not yet in order.

Kwasniewski says that the faithful “want to add *more* to



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the liturgy, to add (so to speak) bells and whistles, to add more incense or more processions or more preparatory prayers or more subsequent prayers or certain repetitions. So there's a kind of augmentation and elaboration of the liturgy. But you never have, in the East or the West, people coming to the liturgy and saying, 'Okay, look, there's something wrong with this liturgy. We need to take it apart, divide it among thirty different *coetus* or committees....' That's *never* happened; it's inconceivable for Christians to do such a thing. And so in that sense, it seems clear that it's not a growth, but a *mutatio*."

Fr. Waldstein raises what he says "seems like a counterexample." He points out that the early Cistercians set about to eliminate the additions to the monastic liturgy that had been made over a long period by the monks of Cluny. They abolished these innovations in the name of a strict observance of the original Rule of St. Benedict. Kwasniewski likens this to "saying we don't want to have a seven-course meal, we want to have a three-course meal. So let's cut away some of the courses that are there. We don't attack the menu; we don't change the cuisine; we just say: we only want three courses. But there's a different kind of change that would be like going from a cooked meal to fast food."

Certainly, the contrast between the ambiance of a traditional Mass and a vernacular *Novus Ordo* celebrated (as it most often is) with little or no regard for the Church's liturgical traditions could well be expressed as the difference between real food and fast

food. But couldn't mere alterations in the text — for example, the elimination of the prayers at the foot of the altar or the Last Gospel — be regarded as a reduction from seven courses to three? I am not advocating or justifying any of the changes made by the *Novus Ordo*; I am simply pointing out that the history of the liturgy is complex. As Kwasniewski himself admits, "You definitely have moments of expansion and moments of contraction." Who is to decide when a particular contraction is an example of going from seven to three courses or going from real food to fast food? In the past, everyone would have replied that, obviously, it's papal authority. Now, when the papally sponsored alterations in the liturgy have resulted in a product that, in this reviewer's opinion, has hardly been helpful for the Church, the matter is less clear, and it is hardly surprising that it has generated many and bitter differences of opinion among Catholics.

This leads to the related question of whether the old rite was properly abrogated, whether there was something "deficient, juridically speaking," in Paul VI's imposing the New Mass. Readers may recall that Benedict XVI, in *Summorum Pontificum*, made the surprising statement that the "edition of the Roman Missal, which was promulgated by Blessed John XXIII in 1962" was "never abrogated." I have often wondered why. Was it because it was not possible for the traditional rite to be abrogated, due to its venerable character, or was it because there was something canonically lacking in Paul VI's language when he issued the New

Mass? Kwasniewski suggests that the wording used was deficient, but he also posits another possibility that was proposed by an unnamed canonist:

There's a distinction between the legitimacy of a liturgical book itself and then the right of a priest to use that book.... So you can have a legitimate liturgical book but also have a priest who doesn't have the permission to use that book.... I think it can be said that the missal of Pope Pius V...was never abrogated, but Pope Paul VI intended to take away permission from the priests to *use* that missal. And that's why...Pope Benedict says not only that the old missal is not abrogated, but also that each priest has permission to use this book without any permission from anybody else. He had to say both of these things.

Of course, as more than one of those engaged in this conversation point out, it's one thing to say that Paul VI's act, whatever his intention, was within his authority *stricto sensu*, and another to ask whether "he has the moral authority to do so," as Kwasniewski puts it. More than once I have heard the question raised whether a pope could suppress the Eastern rites, and simply order Eastern Catholics to be incorporated into the Latin Church. Obviously, such an act would be a colossal error, misjudgment, and abuse of power. But would the supreme pontiff, who, according to Vatican I, has "full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the uni-

versal Church, not only in things which belong to faith and morals, but also in those things which relate to the discipline and government of the Church,” have the authority granted by Christ to do so? The answer suggested in this passage is that although a pope may well have such authority, to use it is to abuse it. Fortunately, it is not necessary for me to offer an opinion on this; I simply note that it is good that such questions are aired. They deserve discussion,

even as we await a final answer.

The sad state of today’s Church has led to a host of theories as to what happened and why. Some of these theories are silly, some are excessively conspiratorial, and some deserve honest discussion. *Tradition & Sanity* raises many of the more reasonable points that can and should be raised. If it does not contain all the answers, the author can hardly be blamed for that. We are not yet 60 years from the conclusion of the

Second Vatican Council. That is not much time in the long history of God’s Church. Perhaps in 60 more years we will have both greater historical perspective and greater theological insight as to what happened, and hence more consensus as to where we are and what we as the Church should do. In the meantime, our duties are the same duties as Catholics always had and always will have until the end of time, when all things finally become clear. ■

ANNE BARBEAU GARDINER

WE’RE MEANT TO REMEMBER

The Shattering of Loneliness: On Christian Remembrance. By Erik Varden. *Bloomsbury Continuum*. 173 pages. \$16.

At age 10, Erik Varden heard from his father, a country veterinarian in Norway, about a farmer

who was working shirtless on a hot day and whose back was deeply scarred from the torture he had endured in World War II. Greatly moved by what his father had seen, the boy started reading about the war and soon realized that “to live, one must learn to look death in the eye.” Although he had been baptized, Varden was an agnostic until age 15, when he listened to Mahler’s *Resurrection* and heard “voices singing of a hope that must, in secret, have gestated in my depths, for I recognized it as mine.” After becoming a fellow at St. John’s College in Cambridge, England, he converted to Catholicism, entered the Cistercian order, became abbot

of Mount St. Bernard’s Abbey in Leicestershire, and, in November 2019, was named bishop-prelate of Trondheim, Norway. Varden calls the Church an inspirer of remembrance reaching back to time’s beginning and “forward into eternity.”

The six chapters of this book are beautiful meditations on six biblical commands to remember. Paradoxically, every one of these commands is a call to move forward: “To remember, really remember, is to slip our moorings and set sail on the open sea,” Bishop Varden writes. He begins with God’s command to Adam after the Fall, “Remember that you are dust.” This means that “I walk

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