

Sola laus leaves liturgy at a loss, says Aldergrove pastor

C.S. Morrissey sat down with Father William Ashley to chat about music in the Liturgy

By C.S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

C.S. Morrissey: How do you think the implementation of the revised translation of the Roman Missal is going? Do people think this is a better translation of the Latin text of the Mass?



C.S. Morrissey

Father William Ashley: Apparently the Web site ChantCafe.com received over a million hits last year. That seems to indicate that there is contemporary interest in the riches of the Catholic liturgical tradition.

CSM: In your parish bulletin recently you drew attention to an essay that appeared on ChantCafe.com by Father Christopher Smith called "Why 'Praise and Worship' Music is Praise, but not Worship."

FWA: Yes, it is worth reading in its entirety. Anyone can easily find it if they Google the words "Christopher Smith Praise and Worship." Father Smith makes clear in his article that praise is part of worship but not the only aspect. What he is trying to correct is the notion that only praise is worship.

CSM: Is that really a

problem today?

FWA: As you know, a typical error of the Protestant reformers was to reduce many teachings to the category of "sola" (the Latin word for "alone"). For example, we have heard the slogan about "sola scriptura": "scripture alone," as if the Bible alone could be the only norm for belief. But, in effect, this denies apostolic tradition.

Then there's the slogan "sola fides": "faith alone." It seems that sticking with this program would require us to deny, or omit, the necessity of charity, love, and sanctifying grace: everything except faith.

CSM: How does this bear upon the liturgy?

FWA: In practice we have all experienced, in one way or another, the effects of this implicit slogan: "sola laus": "praise alone." Behind the reduction of worship to "praise alone" is the denial of the priesthood of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of holy orders, and the denial of the sacrificial nature of the Mass.

True worship, rather, is the sacrifice of Christ ren-



Father William Ashley

dered sacramentally present in the Mass by Christ Himself, the true priest of the new and everlasting covenant. The fullness of worship is also propitiation for sin through the sacrifice of the Cross made present in the Mass.

CSM: So this is missing from the Protestant worship that emphasizes "sola laus"?

FWA: Yes. The Catholic liturgy is the fullness and perfection of divine worship. It has developed from the time of the apostles to our own time, with a given objective content which expresses the true nature of worship.

If we tamper with, or fail to use, the official texts of the liturgy, and replace them with music of a more subjective nature and with subjective texts, to the exclusion of the official texts that express the doctrine and devotion of the Church, to that extent we impoverish, and even falsify, what is supposed to be the normative liturgy of the Church.

CSM: Is impoverished or falsified worship only a recent problem for Christians?



The B.C. Catholic's revised Roman Missal supplement (above) was called "Found in Translation: The Joy of Our Mass." Father Ashley talks about music used for "praise alone," rather than for praise and worship, in a conversation with C.S. Morrissey.

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FWA: Pope Benedict XVI discusses this in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. He mentions how, in

the early centuries of the Church, Gnostic sects used privately composed hymns to insinuate their false doctrine into the official liturgy of the Church. In response to that problem, the Council of Laodicea (363/364) forbade the use of texts other than those from the Bible.

CSM: If the Church was worried about worship then, who is worried today?

FWA: Blessed Pope John Paul II, in the document *Liturgiam Authenticam*, dealt with the problem in the modern Church by requiring that henceforth all hymns in the vernacular languages to be used in the liturgy must receive prior approbation by the Apostolic See itself. This norm will take some time to implement in its entirety. Slowly but surely it will lead to the correction of course that is needed.

CSM: So the norm of the Church is not "sola laus"; "praise alone" is an error.

FWA: Yes! And the Council of Trent (1545-1563) dealt with this error when it taught: "If anyone

says that the sacrifice of the Mass is one only of praise and thanksgiving; or that it is a mere commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross but not a propitiatory one; or that it profits him only who receives, and ought not to be offered for the living and the dead, for sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities, let him be anathema" (Canon 3 on the Mass).

CSM: Pope Benedict XVI shares your concerns about the spirit of the liturgy.

FWA: And he loves good liturgical music. For example, at the papal Mass at the Vatican these days, they sing the proper Entrance, Offertory, and Communion antiphons, and many times the proper Gradual between the readings.

Let us not forget that the ideal of the Catholic liturgy is not to sing hymns and songs of private composition, but to utilize the repertoire of Chant and Polyphony, both propers and ordinary, developed down through the millennia of the Church's history to guarantee the proper presentation of the objective worship of God to people of all ages.

CSM: So the Pope's agenda is: be fully Catholic!

FWA: Yes, this is the agenda of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. But he's not alone. We should congratulate the numerous musicians in all the parishes of our archdiocese who are making determined efforts to enrich the sacred liturgy, particularly at this moment when the new translation has come into effect.

It is a daunting task, but they are responding to it well, and we all look forward to further improvements in the future.

Dr. C.S. Morrissey is a professor of Latin and philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College. Father William Ashley is the pastor of Sts. Joachim and Ann Parish in Aldergrove. □

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