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***Uses of Human sciences to analyze the***  
***« Full, conscious, and active participation »***  
***of the faithfuls to the Eucharist***

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**Introduction**

Since the end of the Second Vatican Council, the texts about liturgy were the subject of intense thought. Human sciences were widely used to describe the logic of the reform. One of the main questions was the « full, conscious, and active participation » of the faithful, and the point is all the more important since, as the text says, this participation is « demanded by the very nature of the liturgy ». I cannot, in twenty minutes, give an exhaustive panorama of the treatment of this question. I have only tried here to build a small but coherent corpus of texts in order to allow a discussion.

**1. Uses of Human sciences for a liturgical reflection during and just after the Council**

To describe the French situation, we obviously have to quote Gelineau's liturgical pastoral manual, that was published after the council to accompany the reform in parishes. The most numerous references to human sciences are in the first volume. Some chapters are logically more concerned : general reflections about the role of body, voice, gesture, in a celebration. The importance of space and time. This does not prevent a variation according to the authors. For example, the chapter *Celebrating through body* could have referred to human sciences, but there is no reference in this area, while the chapter *Celebrating in general* offers almost twenty. The one about *Preaching* quotes Ricoeur, but not the one on *Listening to the word*. There is no reference to psychoanalysis in the chapter *Penitence and Reconciliation*. On the other hand, the one on *Blessings* quotes Françoise Dolto. But we should note that many theologians cited in the chapters (like Vergote, Chenu, Congar...) support their reflections on human sciences.

Two copies of *La Maison Dieu* from the conciliar period are in the corpus: the numbers 91 of 1967 and 93 of 1968. The first of them reports an international colloquium (Louvain, 24th-27th June 1967). Under the general questioning *What do human sciences could bring to an understanding of christian people, or of a christian community celebrating a liturgy?* two questions are put forward : *What is a community celebrations ? What are the forms of an active participation ?* The reflection refers to sociology, psychology, language sciences and early works in communication.

The issue of participation is closely linked to the way in which the chairmanship is exercised. If we refer to sociology, is it relevant to use the notion of leader to qualify the priest's function ? The concepts of participation and community exist in sociology. Is what is lived in the liturgy comparable to what is experienced in other gatherings of everyday life?

Participation also involves language. Even after translation into vernacular languages, we perhaps have to admit that the language of liturgy is abstract. The concepts from language sciences used in

these texts are: the performative speech, Jakobson's language levels, the phatic moments of communication. In number 93, Hameline also addresses the question of the poetic function of language in a ritual.

The rite is a mode of communication of the Church. The thought on communication uses the contemporary categories : transmitter and receiver (Shannon), feedback, context, complementarity between speech and gesture (Palo Alto), global village (Mac Luhan).

Theologians of the council period and the years that followed also deal with the theme of participation, in particular with the link between a ritual and construction of interiority. This preoccupation, as Cerfeaux<sup>1</sup> tells us, has emerged since the beginnings of Christianity, since Saint Paul faced with a difficulty: how to say that Christ lives in us and that we live in Christ?

Why is this internal participation necessary ? Because the created state of mind leads to behavior. According to Chenu<sup>2</sup>, every believer implements an implicit theology in his behavior. This certainty is repeated twenty years later by Chauvet<sup>3</sup> : The sacrament is a pedagogy, which sends us back to act in the world according to what we have learned to be.

Rites offer modalities of participation through language and gestures. The scientific works on *sign* have been widely used. The signs posed in the liturgy are, Chauvet tells us, "scandalously empirical"<sup>4</sup>. K. Rahner already noted: "The gestures of Christ, which he accomplishes through his Church, are, one could say, simply seriously posed gestures"<sup>5</sup>. The philosopher Ladrière extends his interrogations on language to the question of the invariant of meaning, "for a frozen meaning is no longer a meaning at all"<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. The branches of human sciences used today

The spectrum of human sciences used has been extremely broad. Today, in our societies, most of the people only enter a church for the few major stages of their lives and participate in an Eucharist at best once a year at Christmas. What is the state of thinking about participation in this new context?

One concern remains constant: the common cultural background. It is necessary now to take into account a total ignorance of the very foundations of Christianity. The question becomes: is there still a common Christian background in our societies? For Christoph Theobald, our culture and our mentality are impregnated with Christianity, even in a buried or confused way. He refers to the philosopher Marcel Gauchet<sup>7</sup> : for him, Christianity is a very particular religion, that values the emergence of the unexpected in history, because men are attentive to God's unexpected signs. And this has made it is an indisputable actor of modernity<sup>8</sup>. From this point of view, it is possible to trust a request for ritual, because it does not come from nowhere. But some forms of participation no longer work. For example, the alternation of responses during the Eucharist or a marriage blessing. Or the priest is sometimes the only one to know the Lord's Prayer during a christening celebration.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Cerfeaux, *Le chrétien dans la théologie paulinienne*, Cerf, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie est-elle une science ?* Fayard, 1967

<sup>3</sup> L. M. Chauvet, *Symbole et sacrement*, Cerf, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p. 87

<sup>5</sup> K. Rahner, dans « L'appartenance à l'Église », *Écrits théologiques*, tome 2, Desclée de Brouwer, 1958, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ladrière, *L'articulation du sens*, tome 2, Cerf, 1984, p. 104

<sup>7</sup> M. Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde*, Gallimard, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> K. Theobald, *Le christianisme comme style*, Cerf, 2008.

Should we stop at the audible participation? What do we know about what is lived if, as K. Rahner already said, a half-understood formula "can penetrate into the center of men"<sup>9</sup>. But we cannot neglect Roqueplo's question: it is important to know "to what extent terrestrial and profane realities, lived in themselves as terrestrial and profane, are likely to take up [...] a religious significance"<sup>10</sup> ? Today, the works of Bakhtin, Ricoeur or Habermas are considered useful to describe the inner participation and the liturgical experience as the place of a double experience : opening oneself to the unexpected of God and at the same time a way of discovering ourselves: "If therefore you are the body of Christ and his members, then on the Eucharistic table lies your own mystery"<sup>11</sup>."

The particular dimension of the Christian rite has also become a concern in increasingly multicultural societies. Does participation in this specific rite have any particular consequences for the constitution of the participants' state of mind? James Alison, considering René Girard's works<sup>12</sup>, asserts that Christianity overthrew the issue of the scapegoat. This led him to redefine the sacrifice, the place of liturgy and the meaning of Eucharist. He thus inscribes the Eucharistic ritual, as Hans-Urs von Balthasar did, in a dramatic dimension of the world. The Church, said the Swiss theologian, should come out of a discourse on immutable realities, to "throw it into the drama"<sup>13</sup>. Christianity is not a spirituality seeking for serenity to achieve a form of well-being. It is the ascertainment of a tragedy of history and existence, in which everyone has his role to play.

### 3. Consequences on the writing of songs and hymns

Singing is an extremely effective way to involve an assembly. The lyrics are an element in a complete textual set (biblical texts, words of the ritual, homily, welcoming words ..). This relative place does not prevent us from paying much attention to them, as they are also a possibility of personal choice during family rituals (wedding, christening, funerals).

The passage into vernacular languages has resulted in a strong production of songs and hymns for religious communities, parishes and religious gatherings. This production continues today. We shall now see, through the great diversity of writings, how the thoughts on participation have had an echo among authors.

Is religious language too abstract ?

*Sometimes all the terms are abstract*

Be jubilant, shout for joy!

Acclaim the three-times-holy God!

or

O Source of unity in the world, [...]

you offer us your glory.

*Sometimes the words are concrete, but each concrete word is strongly coded on a religious level*

You are *bread* of all hope,

*Bread* that makes all men live!

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<sup>9</sup> K. Rahner, « Situation spirituelle des catholiques et de l'Église », dans *Écrits théologiques*, volume 7, Desclée de Brouwer, 1967, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> P. Roqueplo, *Expérience du monde, expérience de Dieu ?*, Cerf, 1968, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> Saint Augustin, cité par W. Kasper, *L'Eucharistie*, Cerf, 2005, p. 272.

<sup>12</sup> J. Alison, *12 leçons sur le christianisme*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> H.U. von Balthasar, *Dramatique divine*, tome 2, Lethielleux, 1986, p. 96

*There are texts in which the concrete terms are mostly used*

Your fingers have brought out the big sea monsters,  
The infinitely small in the grasses of fields,  
Their voices and their silence shouted your wonders.

The liturgical experience is a pedagogy of faith

*Choosing mostly catechetical formulas*

God's People, city of Emmanuel  
God's "People saved in the blood of Christ,  
Baptized people, Church of the Lord,  
Praise to you!

*Sticking as much as possible to the biblical text*

You will be my witnesses around the world (Ac. 1, 7)  
The Spirit of truth will be your light (Jn 4, 34)

*Introducing elements of interpretation*

Beyond these words  
that fill the world,  
clanging and resounding,  
Give us the language of love,  
The Love that never ends.

Should liturgical singings be poetic...

Like the bird, far from the earth,  
You would like to fly  
To the sun, to the light  
In a sky of freedom.

*or mostly explanatory...*

Since God has loved us  
And has given us his Son  
Neither death nor sin  
Could tear us away  
From the love that comes from him!

*or using a metaphor around an expression of faith ?*

O Father of the centuries of the world,  
Here is the last born of the days,  
That ascends through us  
To meet the First-born of your love.

The singings expresses forms of personal experience

*A human relationship allows us to understand our relationship with God*

On the threshold of his house,  
Our Father is waiting for you.  
And the arms of God  
Will open for you.

*God teaches us to be ourselves*  
From crossings to crossings  
We become what we are  
From crossings to crossings  
Your day takes us and shapes us.

*To recall the dramatic dimension of existence and history*  
As He is with us  
In this time of violence,  
Do not dream that he is everywhere  
Except where one dies ...

*To affirm a responsibility*  
We will be the prophets speaking for the earth  
And for all that lives,  
And for all that weeps for eternal silence.  
For those whose eyes are the cry,  
We will be that voice that nothing will silence.

## **Conclusion**

Liturgical renewal has been accompanied by thinkers and practitioners with a strong social science background. This companionship continues today, partly renewed, with other authors, other schools, other concepts. The lyrics are a kind of answer to the questions asked. They seek, each according to his own balance and the profile of the author, to teach the formulas of faith, catechize, deepen the interiority, build the link between faith and personal life, say the responsibility of the believer.

The human sciences have at the same time always been relativised. "The purpose of the liturgical assembly is not primarily to convey a message (this is the purpose of didactic training); nor to promote the ethics of Christian life (that is pursued by the life review groups); nor to promote affective cohesion around a leader and a common goal. Its purpose is to constitute Christians as such and the Christian community as such<sup>14</sup>." "And ministry is that particular form of relationship that makes one represent in the name of others those moments of silence and solitary activity that build the story as an individual and collective drama. In this drama is constituted the [...] unforeseen. And even the everyday when we wait for lyrical flights and social commitments<sup>15</sup>."

So why use them? Because they are human sciences. Because they help humanity of thinking its relationship with God. This means that the strength of the rite is to deeply meet our humanity. That the intelligence of faith consists in understanding a "message" that is a way of life, a way of being in relation, or present to another<sup>16</sup>. That our effort of expression and understanding of God is not in vain. That it will not run up against an impossibility to know and understand. That the peculiarity of Christianity is the incarnation. That, reminds us Pannenberg, to start from the humanity of man has always been in Christianity one of the modalities of the knowledge of God<sup>17</sup>. Human sciences thus appear as the fundamental marker of a theological attitude.

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<sup>14</sup> A. Vergote, « Regard du psychologue sur le symbolisme liturgique », *La Maison Dieu*, n°91, 1967.

<sup>15</sup> J. Moltmann, *L'Église dans la force de l'Esprit*, Cerf, 1980, p. 336.

<sup>16</sup> K. Theobald, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> W. Pannenberg, *Théologie systématique*, Cerf, 2008.