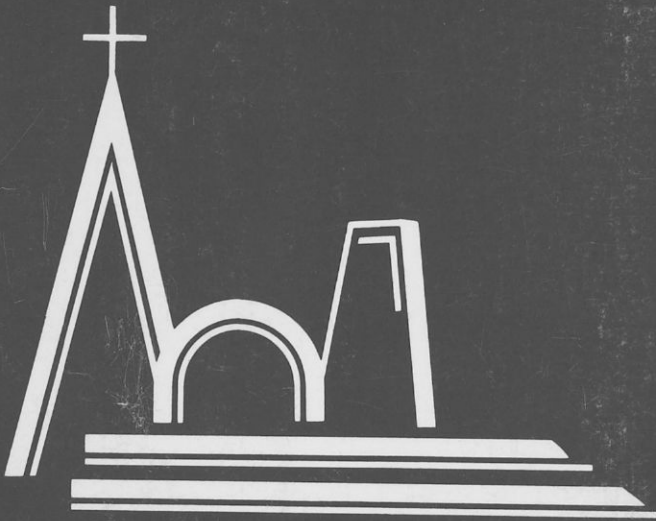


Catala, Ignazio M.
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and an altar
ABS 3971

SERVITE FATHERS
ASSUMPTION CHURCH
ILLINOIS STREET
ILLINOIS 60610



THE DEDICATION
OF A CHURCH
AND AN ALTAR:
A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

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SERVITE FATHERS
ASSUMPTION CHURCH
323 WEST ILLINOIS STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60610

THE DEDICATION OF A CHURCH AND AN ALTAR A Theological Commentary

by Ignazio M. Calabuig, O.S.M.
Consultor, Congregation for the Sacraments and
Divine Worship

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Preface

The dedication of a church is an important event in the life of a Christian community. It involves more than merely setting aside a building for the celebration of sacred things, since the people who plan and build and dedicate a sacred place are themselves the Church, "that is, the temple of God built of living stones, where the Father is worshiped in spirit and in truth. Rightly, then, from early times the name 'church' has also been given to the building in which the Christian community gathers to hear the word of God, to pray together, to celebrate the sacraments, and to participate in the eucharist" (*Rite for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, Chapter II, No. 1).

Father Ignazio Calabuig's commentary on the *Rite for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, first appeared in *Notitiae*, the periodical of the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. It was in the same issue that the Latin *Praenotanda* of the revised rite was initially published by decree of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. Father Calabuig presented his commentary in *Notitiae* as a consultor to the Congregation. The present English translation does not include the voluminous notes of the original, although certain references have been incorporated into the text (see *Notitiae*, 13 [1977] 391-450).

The commentary is best read with the *Rite for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar* at hand. A provisional English language translation of this section of Part II of the Roman Pontifical was made available by ICEL in 1978. In 1979 this same translation was published in another format for liturgical use by the United States Catholic Conference Publications Office.

Parishes planning to build or renovate churches may profitably read Fr. Calabuig's commentary along with a study of the rite itself, as well as Chapter 5 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*, a statement of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

The proper celebration of the Rite for Dedication demands more than a simple familiarity with its structure. An understanding of the theological significance and liturgical purpose of each text and action will fill the ritual structure with that spirit and life which befits a true liturgical celebration of the People of God.

The Secretariat
The Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

Introduction

On May 29, 1977, the feast of Pentecost, *The Rite for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar* was promulgated by decree of Cardinal James Knox, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine



Worship. The document is part of *The Roman Pontifical as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*.

The books of the Roman liturgy that were revised as a consequence of the decisions of the ecumenical council were inaugurated on August 15, 1968, with a rite of the pontifical, *The Ordination of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops*. From that time on, the following rites have appeared: the *Consecration to a Life of Virginity*, May 31, 1970, the *Blessing of an Abbot and Abbess*, November 9, 1970, the *Rite for the Blessing of Oils* and the *Rite for Consecrating Chrism*, December 3, 1970, the *Rite of Confirmation*, August 22, 1971, and the *Institution of Readers and Acolytes, Admission to Candidacy for Ordination as Deacons and Priests*, December 3, 1972.

The new *Rite for the Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, the content of which was previously part of Book II of *The Roman Pontifical*, develops its themes in two directions. It continues in part the reform of the pontifical which appeared in the *editio typica* of 1961 on the vigil of the council. In that edition the *Rite for the Dedication of a Church* had been carefully revised, but swiftly moving events made further revision necessary, and showed that it was no more than a first step towards a definitive re-ordering of the system. It also continues the work of restoration and revision of the Roman liturgical books, initiated in 1968 and promulgated originally by the Sacred Congregation of Rites working with the "Consilium," subsequently by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, and now by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship.

In May, 1970, Study Group XXI bis, with Monsignor Pierre Jounel in charge, was formed within the Congregation for Divine Worship and given the responsibility for restoring and revising the rites of Book II of the pontifical.

It is not necessary at this point to discuss in detail the phases of that effort, which concluded with the formulation of a proposal for the revision of Book II, approved by the plenary session of the Sacred Congregation in March, 1972. The proofs of the draft manuscript appeared the following spring and were sent to conferences of bishops, centers for liturgical studies, and liturgical experts in order to sound out their responses.

This project, subsequently reelaborated according to the particular outlook and needs of other Roman departments, constitutes the immediate precedent for the rite that now appears in *editio typica*.

The new liturgical book consists of seven chapters:

Chapter I. Laying of a Foundation Stone or the Commencement of Work on the Building of a Church.

Chapter II. Rite of Dedication of a Church.

Chapter III. Rite of the Dedication of a Church Already in General Use for Sacred Celebrations.

Chapter IV. Rite of Dedication of an Altar.

Chapter V. Rite of Blessing of a Church.

Chapter VI. Rite of Blessing of an Altar.

Chapter VII. Rite of Blessing of a Chalice and Paten.

The chapters do not cover all of the contents of Book II of the pontifical but only its most important rites. Each chapter, as is usually the case with the greater part of post-conciliar works on the liturgy, contains *Praenotanda* or introductions of a rubrical and doctrinal nature. The introductions, it is well known, vary considerably in depth and treatment from one book to another. The doctrinal element, in this particular case, is not formally developed at length. Rather than confine it to the necessary tight forms of the introductions, the editors decided to let the rich theological content of the texts speak for itself.

What were the criteria used in the revised edition of the *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*? The list contained in the minutes of "Coetus a studiis XXI bis" is a long one. One criterion, however, stands out: the need to simplify the rites. This simplification, the concern of many, was virtually prerequisite to the pastoral efficacy of the rite itself. The centuries-old development and accretions of the ceremony had made what was literally a "popular" rite from the very beginning into a celebration that for many was incomprehensible. The liturgical point of the rite had been smothered by a profusion of signs. Simplification of this sort necessarily entailed the pruning away of parts valid in themselves, but which in their accumulation—like an excess of fine furniture in an overcrowded room—made for a good deal of clutter. The needed simplification, then, had to embrace symbolic and expressive elements, but at the same time implement the primacy of noble simplicity as the ideal, the very ideal of the *Constitution on the Liturgy*.

All other criteria come down to two fundamental points: faithfulness to the text and its renewal. These are the principles that in this field account for all authentic progress: faithfulness to history, to the traditional Roman liturgy, and to the principles formulated in the documents of Vatican II; and similar faithfulness to the key ideas animating the revision of postconciliar liturgical works. The pastoral efficacy of such faithfulness, of course, is given witness only when the rite is implemented with intelligence and order.

The renewal of the rite, then, is to be appreciated not as a concession to changing fashions but as the recognition and discernment of authentic and legitimate ecclesial needs, and as the ability to incorporate into the ancient structure of the Roman liturgy the valid contributions of other cultures. As for other criteria and principles of this renewal, the way in which particular problems were solved, as well as the animating spirit of the work, will make them clear.

The dedication of a church, like baptism and confirmation, is a rite that is enacted but once. And just as rites of initiation mark or attest to essential phases in Christian life, so the dedication of a church points to a unique and characteristic moment in the life of a local church. A Church may come into being, exist without masonry walls. Christ is the reason for its existence and the Holy Spirit the well-spring of its life. Yet since the pilgrim Church on earth cannot exist outside the categories of space and time, it usually erects buildings of stone which are the visible counterparts of the invisible "house of God" (1 Cor. 3:9), the place where the faithful meet in their worship or in holy assembly.

The dedication of a church, consequently, is the occasion for joy over the completion of a work which required effort, sacrifice, and unremitting toil. The dedication of a church also provides the propitious moment for the local Church to see itself as the true "Temple of God," to renew its obligation to "build itself" as the Church, and to increase its membership, its "living stones." In building itself in the midst of other buildings in the temporal city, the Church can ponder the meaning of its presence in the world, the value of its services to humanity.

The new *Dedication of a Church and an Altar* can contribute much to this end, provided the pastoral preparation is adequate, and provided the liturgy be understood and loved for its eloquence and straightforwardness.

THE DEDICATION OF A CHURCH

The structure of chapter II of the *Dedication of a Church and an Altar* is clear and linear: it distinguishes and skillfully draws attention to the various moments which lead up to the culminating point. It consists of four parts: 1) the celebration of the introductory rites, which are not merely a preparation but are themselves meaningful ritual moments and, like every good introduction, contain what is to be thematically developed; 2) the proclamation and the reception of the word of God, a significant part of every Christian celebration, particularly relevant in this instance; 3) a discussion of some typical rites for the dedication of a church common to the liturgical traditions of both East and West; 4) the culminating point of the rite: the celebration of the memorial of the Lord, the central moment in the dedication of the house of worship.

Introductory Rites A CHURCH GATHERS TO DEDICATE A CHURCH

1. Entrance into the Church (nos. 28-47)

The entry of the community into the new church, from the point of view of ritual, is a very meaningful and poetic moment. For the first time the ecclesial community enters into the new house of worship in order to celebrate the eucharist.

Christian communities today live in very different circumstances one from another. In many places throughout the world, laws forbid the congregation of the faithful outside the church for the purpose of ritual; elsewhere a convocation of this sort for a variety of reasons would be inopportune; in other situations the occasion is not only a cause for religious but civic celebration as well. Taking these differences into account, the rite realistically considers three divergent modes of entry into the new church:

—the procession (nos. 29-35), the most complete expression of the rite, which calls for the celebration of part of the liturgy outside the new church;

—the solemn entrance (nos. 36-42), which, though limiting the liturgy outside the church to the indispensable minimum, marks that progress with a rich solemnity;

—simple entrance (nos. 43-47), in which the introductory rites take place completely within the new church. In appreciation of the principle of authenticity (*veritas rerum*) the rite of the opening of the door does not take place, since it would appear contrived if not playacting.

The first form represents the most complete and fitting ritual form, even though it will probably not be the most frequently used.

a) Convocation of the People of God (nos. 29-30)

The value of nos. 29-30 of the rite is not confined to their significance as a rubric. These sections look upon the gathering of clergy and laity as the liturgical assembly of the local Church come together to celebrate a particular *statio*, that is, the dedication of the new church. They translate into ritual terms a very precise theological notion: all of the local Church is gathered together because all of it, hierarchically structured with its diversity of ministers and functions, is the celebrant of the rite of dedication. And in a certain sense what is involved here is more than an assembly of the local Church at this particular moment; for in many instances the local Church is one, ideally, with its celebrated sons and daughters who have given glorious witness in martyrdom, or in a heroic evangelical life. The people, in fact, come together where the relics of martyrs or saints have been placed beneath the altar of the new church.

The place of convocation (no. 29) calls for a few words of commentary. It will be a nearby church, or, should there not be one, some other acceptable place. In this instance, too, the rite reflects the truth of the situation: as light comes from light (the symbolism of the lighting of the candles in the Easter Vigil), as faith generates faith (the rite of baptism), so does one community emerge from another. Symbolically, from a house of worship, a sign of the mother community arises another house of worship, the sign and place of a new ecclesial community.

The People of God has come together and there is the moment of greeting from the bishop to the faithful, from the faithful to the bishop. The greeting formula reads: "The grace and peace of God be with all of you in his holy Church" (no. 30). Its intent is to emphasize from the very outset the ecclesial sense of the rite.

With respect of the greeting, the rubric which follows the proposed formula is particularly noteworthy: "Or other suitable words taken preferably from sacred scripture" (no. 30). This is a traditional rubric but in a certain sense new, for while it allows ample liberty for the creative gifts of the celebrant, it turns him toward sacred Scripture, the inexhaustible and insuperable fount of inspiration for all liturgy.

The greeting and the introductory admonition are two liturgical expressions which in this rite, as in many others, follow one another in logical order. Thus the admonition follows the greeting, as if the latter had coherently turned into exhortation and instruction.

The sample offered by the rite implicitly asks that the admonition be brief. The rubric which precedes it—"in these or similar words" (no. 30)—suggests that it should not be considered as a stereotyped form, but rather express the concrete situation of the community and the real feelings of the bishop. In any case the admonition will hardly ignore the themes inherent in the proposed formula. That formula provides a synthesis of the essential motifs of the entire celebration:

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
this is a day of rejoicing:
we have come together to dedicate this church
by offering within it the sacrifice of Christ.

May we open our hearts and minds
to receive his word with faith:
may our fellowship
born in the one font of baptism
and sustained at the one table of the Lord,
become the one temple of his Spirit,
as we gather round his altar in love (no. 30).

The reader will notice the reference to the fundamental importance of celebrating the eucharist in the dedication of a church: "we have come together to dedicate this church/by offering within it the sacrifice of Christ"; concentration on the celebration of God's word: "to receive his word with faith"; recalling the baptismal font as the birthplace of Christian community: "our fellowship/born in the one font of baptism"; reference to the eucharistic table as the place of spiritual nourishment for the community: "and sustained at the one table of the Lord." And the whole is seen with reference to the community's spiritual growth, for that community gathered around the altar of celebration—a visible sign of the invisible unanimity of hearts—is the true spiritual temple, built with living stones (see 1 Peter 2:5). It must grow unceasingly and, moved by divine love, strive to "become the one temple of his Spirit,/as we gather round his altar in love." (*in templum spiritale crescat/et superno provehatur amore*). This is an expression of the inner growth, of the striving towards the heights typical of every Christian community. That is the point of the first word of the admonition which from the very beginning expresses the festive and luminous joy that is a constant characteristic of the rite.

b) A People on a Journey (nos. 31-32)

With the end of the admonition, the People of God sets out on its journey. The processional entry is both a real journey of the community towards its new church and a sign of the journey of the pilgrim Church on earth towards the heavenly Temple. Number 31 offers specific guidance for the order of the procession, and this concern is more than a question of rubrics: it is a reflection or meditation on the Church. The faithful on a journey with their bishop are not a crowd but a liturgical assembly. They are a holy people hierarchically structured. The order of the procession reflects the ordered composition of the local Church.

It is important that the meaning of the rubric, "The crossbearer leads the procession" (no. 31), be made clear to the faithful. The Church on its journey follows the cross of Christ. Moreover, when the procession also involves the transferral of relics of martyrs or saints it is well to stress that, in so doing, the Church follows in the steps of its members who have given lofty witness to the following of Christ.

A people in procession is a singing people. The rite proposes as a processional hymn the beautiful Psalm 121, introduced by the antiphon: "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord" (no. 32).

This hymn of the journey up to the Holy City, a lyrical expression of the joy of the Israelite pilgrims coming close to Jerusalem, becomes the hymn of the Church which, though it has already realized within itself the mystery of the City of Zion, continues its journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem with the aid of signs, including that of the house of the Church.

c) A *Statio* at the Threshold of the Church (no. 33)

Having come to the threshold of the new church, the procession will pause briefly before the closed doors. Here the meeting of the bishop with representatives of the community will take place, above all with those who have had a very active part in the building of the new church. In the history of the rites for the dedication of a church, this encounter constitutes a new ritual sequence that seeks to express, in liturgical terms, the value of an old, deeply human, and Christian reality: the labor of people for the building of the church. This is work by which today as in the past (the medieval guilds of church builders come immediately to mind) humanity has given admirable expression to its religious sense.

In our times the legislative and economic context of the construction of churches is quite different from one country to another, from one region to another, indeed at times within the confines of one and the same city. In one case the church arises out of community demands and faith, the result of collective participation: the members of a community put economic goods, intelligence, and labor at the service of the building of a house of prayer. In another instance, the participation of the community is very tenuous and indirect: the church is built at the instance of the state, which provides a sum of money and assigns the work to a corporation concerned almost exclusively with questions of profit and loss.

Obviously the rite could neither contemplate all cases nor, in any one instance provide every directive. The meeting discussed in no. 33 will be adapted to individual cases and varying needs. In any case, it will express the appreciation of the Church for labor, the hard work and fatigue that are a necessary part of building a church.

In the scenario envisioned by the rite, the meeting assumes the aspect of a presentation of the new ecclesial edifice to the bishop, inasmuch as he represents the head of the diocesan Church. Just as the community participates with the bishop in the faith and spiritual riches of the Kingdom, so the community shares with him the property of the new house of God, which becomes part of the common patrimony of the diocese.

According to the rite, the signs of the presentation can be expressed in a number of ways. Their function is to highlight one aspect or another of the building's construction: juridical signs (a sign of ownership of the building or the keys); technical signs (the architectural drawings of the church); affective signs (an account of the construction with the signatures of administrators and workers).

But a church also has a soul. It responds to a concept of faith. In a Byzantine church, for example, the architectural design follows precise traditional canons, at times sanctioned by councils, and reflects a rich and complex theological reality. The history of sacred architecture documents instances in which the Church has wonderfully expressed the fullness of its mission or vocation: the sign of the presence of an ecclesial community, a quasi sacrament in which the blessed vision of the heavenly Jerusalem appears filtered through the veil of matter. Contemporary architecture, with its many contrasting trends, and in spite of uneven results, also seeks to express through new techniques, technology, and materials its own vision of the Church. Since the *Rite for the Dedication of a Church* could not ignore all these considerations, the rubric of the rite discretely suggests: "One of the representatives addresses the bishop and the community in a few words, pointing out, if need be, what the new church expresses in its art and in its own special design" (no. 33).

d) The Opening of the Door (nos. 34-35)

The opening of the door in the rite is of ancient origin. It goes back, for its inspiration, to the rite of the dedication of the basilica of Santa Sophia in Constantinople which took place on December 24, 562.

In the revised rite the opening of the door is retained since it is a sensible recognition of what is happening: the door is closed because the church has not yet been inaugurated or "open" to the celebration of the holy mysteries. It is opened so that entering through it the local Church might take possession of the new edifice. All former theatrical elements, however, have been removed from the rite. The natural movement of entrance, it is recognized, is by itself a more than adequate expression of a liturgical act.

The rite, consequently, calls for a brief rite of actually opening the door, and an invitation to the faithful, on the part of the bishop, to enter the church singing Psalm 23. The bishop invites the pastor of the new church to open the door. The rubric, no doubt, implies the pastoral and theological notion which lies behind the action of opening: the priest, pastor of that part of the flock of Christ, must himself be the one who opens the door (*ianitor*), and also the door (*ianua*). With the proclamation of the word, that is, he must open the hearts of the faithful to knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom, just as with his life, in imitation of the Good Shepherd, he is to be the door of the sheepfold.

For the invitation tendered by the bishop, the rite proposes a verse from the psalms (Psalm 99:4): "Go within his gates giving thanks, enter his courts with songs of praise" (no. 34). This is a particularly fitting text in terms of its content, an invitation to cross the threshold of the new church "with hymns of praise, to enter its porches with hymns of praise." It is taken from Psalm 99, which was sung by Israelite pilgrims as they entered the Temple on solemn liturgical feasts—a text, in brief, that is very much in the spirit of the original. But the use of this particular psalm is only a suggestion. The invitation may be formulated by the bishop with words of his own choosing. He may, if he wishes, take the occasion to speak, no matter how briefly, of matters that strictly speaking have not found a place in the ritual action.

On the invitation of the bishop, the holy people begins its journey anew, according to the typical arrangement of an entrance procession. The entrance hymn is Psalm 23, accompanied by an antiphon taken from the same psalm (verse 7): "Lift high the ancient portals. The King of glory enters" (no. 34). Psalm 23 is traditional in the rite of dedication of a church, but in the revised rite a more meaningful use is made of it, since it replaces the Litany of the Saints as an entrance hymn.

The application is particularly felicitous: a characteristic entrance hymn for the entry into the new church. The first section (verses 1-6) was a part of the ritual of the arrival of pilgrims at the Temple of Jerusalem, and the second section (verses 6-10) appears to be an echo of the liturgy celebrating the solemn entry of the Ark of the Covenant into the tent built by David in Jerusalem. But it is an "entrance psalm" above all because Christian tradition—having identified at a very early point the *Rex gloriae* of the psalm with Christ, Lord and Savior—interpreted the psalm in christological terms, and accordingly saw in it a prophecy of the word's "coming into the world" fulfilled in the mystery of the incarnation. At other times this tradition saw in it the "triumphal entry" of Christ into Jerusalem as his passover was drawing near, or his "entry into heaven" after the resurrection-ascension, where he sits at the right hand of the Father. In an overall view of the dedication of a church, the psalm is seen to have elements of a coronation: it proclaims that Christ, true King of Glory, is Lord and Head of the community of believers—the Church—which gathers him into itself. And this lordship of Christ over the Church-people has its symbolic expression in the solemn entry of the

cross into the church-edifice where it will preside, glorious and peace-bringing, from the apse or altar, over the assembly.

The bishop, on entering, will go directly to the chair: "The bishop, without kissing the altar, goes to the chair" (no. 35), and the other participants will go to their proper places.

The omission of the gesture of kissing the altar, which is completely stripped, is understandable since this sign of veneration is given only after the altar has been anointed with chrism. But the first seating in the chair, even if it is not the object of a particular ritual gesture, has a precise meaning. The bishop, by virtue of his episcopal ordination, in an eminent and visible way acts in the name of Christ teacher, pastor, and pontiff; thus he is first to take the place from which he will preside and exercise the magisterial function. That place, which is simply the chair of the celebrant, is on this occasion a true chair of the bishop, as the rite stresses.

2. The Blessing and Sprinkling of Water (nos. 48-50)

It is well known that in the dedication of a church the rite of sprinkling (*lustratio*) formerly had a very important place, and a very elaborate ceremony connected with it. The *lustratio* of the new edifice was complicated, detailed. The walls of the building, within and without, the pavement and individual altars, were all sprinkled with "gregorian" water; each and every sprinkling was made according to a carefully defined manner and sequence in which song and silence, exorcisms and prayers, were alternately used.

a) Some Historical Data

Historians of liturgy do not agree on when the *lustratio* became part of the rite of dedication, nor is there unanimity on its application or necessity. We do not know whether the *lustratio*, when first used, was applied indiscriminately or only in those instances, quite frequent after the peace of Constantine, in which the new church arose on a formerly pagan site, or was actually the transformation of a former pagan temple.

The liturgy of Rome, from at least the sixth century on, was acquainted with the *lustratio* and used it with characteristic sobriety. During the same epoch in Gaul the rite had become particularly overgrown and complicated. The love of Gallican liturgy for symbolism, and its tendency to express itself in biblical terms (though preferring Old Testament sources for inspiration), had at a very early time brought about the famous parallel construct: just as a Christian becomes the temple of God, receiving in succession the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist, so an edifice becomes a house (*domus*) or temple of god (*templum Dei*) with lustral ablutions (baptism), anointing with sacred oils (confirmation), and the eucharist, the celebration of which can take place only after the preliminary *lustratio* and *unctio*. Other rites of the dedication of a church were modeled on other parts of the Christian's initiation into faith.

A definitive solution of the historical problems connected with the *lustratio* would allow us better to evaluate its meaning and importance. One fact, however, is quite clear: for many centuries in all the *ordines* for dedication, and in the 1961 *Roman Pontifical*, the *lustratio* is present as a "preparatory rite" for the consecration of a church, a preparation which consists of a grand and complex exorcism. Indeed with the *lustratio* the Church meant to put the evil one to flight, as well as any influence he might have on the building which the community had dedicated to worship and to the glory of the omnipotent God.

b) The General Orientation of the New Rite

This ancient liturgical tradition could not be put aside, nor—since it was not founded on any original element—could it be considered an absolutely indispensable part of the new rite.

At this point we may see the reason for those texts chosen by the designers of the revised rite: the *lustratio* no longer has as its end the "purification" of walls. It is retained in order to stimulate the assembly's spirit of conversion, to recall the rite of baptism and the first steps of the Christian's journey: "You must reform and be baptized, each one of you" (Acts 2:38). The texts speak clearly. In this spirit the rubric reads: "When the entrance rite is completed, the bishop blesses water with which to sprinkle the people as a sign of repentance and as a reminder of their baptism, and to purify the walls and the altar of the new church" (no. 48).

The same meaning also appears in the introductory admonition to the prayer of blessing over the water: "Let us ask the Lord our God to bless this water, created by his hand. It is a sign of our repentance, a reminder of our baptism and a symbol of the cleansing of these walls and this altar" (no. 48).

This rite of sprinkling, because of its nature and its Easter themes, has obvious similarities with the sprinkling of the assembly on Sunday, itself a weekly recalling of baptism. As a consequence, the "entrance into the church" is considered here as the opportunity to relive baptismal conversion.

As we noted, the ancient tradition of the *lustrario* could not be totally dismissed. Thus in the new rite the sprinkling is given to assembly and building, to humanity and its works. Scholars, no doubt, will appreciate the new orientation of the sprinkling, now conceived predominantly in terms of Easter. A number of them may look upon this solution as a compromise, as an ambiguous response. Others may see it, in view of the rite's central notion, as a vision of humanity and the cosmos being rescued from the mysterious powers of evil, brought back to God in Christ. This is a vision which acknowledges the mystery of evil in humanity, the division at the center of its being (see Rom 7: 14-25; Gal 5: 17). It is a vision acknowledging a world which, sharing in the curse inflicted on humanity (see Gen 3: 17), finds itself in a state of bondage where it longs for deliverance (see Rom 8: 19-23).

It would not have been prudent, consequently, as long as the problem of the exorcisms and the blessing of things was left unsolved, to eliminate this traditional liturgical element, which is common to both Eastern and Western churches. The present solution gives humanity the central place but does not forget the things of this world.

c) The Rite of Sprinkling

The ritual sequence is clear and the texts, even when new, have the ring of classical liturgical prayer.

The admonition (no. 48), no more than a suggestion, offers a synthetic sense of the sprinkling and fittingly introduces the prayer for the blessing of the water.

The formula for the blessing is a new text which, with slight modifications, appears in more than one chapter of the *Dedication of a Church and an Altar*:

Lord, you call every creature to the light of life,
and surround us with such great love
that when we stray
you continually lead us back to Christ our head.
For you have established an inheritance of such mercy,
that those sinners, who pass through water made sacred,
die with Christ and rise restored
as members of his body
and heirs of his eternal covenant.

Bless this water;
sanctify it.

As it is sprinkled upon us and throughout this church
make it a sign of the saving waters of baptism,
by which we become one in Christ, the temple of your Spirit.

May all here today,
and all those in days to come,
who celebrate your mysteries in this church
be united at last in the city of your peace.

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord (no. 48).

It is not necessary to dwell at length on the analysis of this formula, but a few of the particulars would be helpful:

—lines 5-7 which, inspired by the Letter to the Romans 6:1-8, recall the Easter significance of baptism and vividly represent the act of immersion-emergence:

For you have established an inheritance of such mercy,
that those sinners, who pass through water made sacred,
die with Christ and rise restored;

—lines 13-14 which, with the initial ritual of the sprinkling of the building, remind the faithful of their baptism, the "saving water" achieved in

Christ to make of them a temple of the spirit:

make it [the water] a sign of the saving waters of baptism,
by which we become one in Christ, the temple of your Spirit.

One reality alone, the use of water, is expressed in terms which build to a climax. *Ros* and *unda*, *aspersio*, *lavabrum*, *ablutio*—these are different aspects and effects of the sacrament of water, the diverse ways in which the one and multifarious divine mercy expresses itself.

The two antiphons suggested by the rite for the sprinkling are biblical in origin and of a baptismal nature. During Lent the antiphon "I will pour clean water" (no. 49), taken from Ezekiel 36:25-26, is used; for all other liturgical seasons the antiphon is "I saw water flowing" (no. 49), taken from Ezekiel 47:1-2, 9. These antiphons are well known. Their baptismal character underlines the modified use of the old *lustratio* in the revised rite.

The formula "God, the Father of mercies" (no. 50) is also a new one. Placed at the conclusion of a rite with penitential aspects, it has the typical structure of a deprecatory absolution. It intertwines two expressions that run through the rite—house of prayer (*domus orationis*) and dwelling place (*templum habitationis*) the two realities that denote the divine presence.

For the *domus* we pray:

May God, the Father of mercies,
dwell in this house of prayer,

invoking the presence of God and his favor, mercy, and assistance for the community's house of worship.

For the *templum*, we ask:

May the grace of the Holy Spirit cleanse us,
for we are the temple of his presence.

This is an invocation for the purification of the gathered assembly.

Here the *templum* (temple)—*habitatio Dei* (house of God) is not a building of stone but, according to the well-known Pauline passage used as a text (see 1 Cor. 3: 17), the community of the faithful. That community must be purified by the grace of the Holy Spirit: "Cleanse us, for we are the temple of his presence." And so, unexpectedly, through the use of the term *purificet* (cleanse), we recover the very deepest sense of the *lustratio*.

3. The Church Glorifies the Father and the Lamb in the Spirit (nos. 51-52)

With the conclusion of the rite of water, the celebration proceeds along the lines of a Sunday celebration of the eucharist; that is, with the singing of the *Gloria* (no. 51) and the opening prayer (no. 52).

In the prescription for the singing of the *Gloria* we should see not so much the automatic application of a customary rubric—the dedication of

a church is a solemn occasion and therefore requires a *Gloria*—but rather a conscious adherence to the spirit of the ancient hymn, the joyous song with which the “Church, assembled in the Spirit, praises and prays to the Father and the Lamb” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 31).

If we ponder this twofold prayer we will enter the spirit and meaning of the *Gloria* for the dedication of a church, and be aware of:

—the analogy between the reasons for the *Gloria* (the *natalis Domini*, or birth of the Lord, whether it be the *nativitas a matre*—birth from a mother, or the *nativitas a sepulchro*—birth from the tomb) and of the rite of dedication (the *natalis ecclesiae*—birth of a church), the sign and celebration of the *natalis Ecclesiae* (the birth of the Church);

—the natural and meaningful way in which the *Gloria* takes its place in the ritual sequence: the community, having entered for the first time the house of worship, after having been purified by the grace of the Spirit in the rite of sprinkling, sings out in praise of the Father and the Lamb.

The opening prayer, in accord with its function, completes the introductory rites:

Lord,
fill this place with your presence,
and extend your hand
to all those who call upon you.

May your word here proclaimed
and your sacraments here celebrated
strengthen the hearts of all the faithful (no. 52).

This prayer, which serves several functions, no doubt derives from the one present in the *Gelasianum Vetus*, which is traditional in the rite of dedication of a church. The text, however, is not simply retained or repeated. The *incipit* (beginning) has been changed and lines 5-6 have been added. They proclaim, in a vigorous synthesis, the two pastoral functions that are to take place recurrently in the new church: the service of the word and the sacraments.

The Liturgy of the Word **THE WORD CALLS THE COMMUNITY INTO BEING**

The community is born of the word, is nourished by it, and grows and develops by means of it. This is why in the revised rite the liturgy of the word has a value that is independent of its relationship to the celebration of the eucharist—even though it would be unthinkable to separate the *mensa corporis Domini* (table of the body of the Lord) from the *mensa verbi* (table of the word). This autonomy is one of the distinguishing traits of the revised rite with respect to its antecedents.

From the point of view of ritual alone, the liturgy of the word in its development appears as the dedication of the ambo, the place-sign of

God's word. As a liturgical reality, however, the ritual has broader implications: it underscores the value of the proclamation of the word, which calls the community into being and is itself an essential moment in our faith.

The liturgy of the word is structured basically along the lines of the eucharistic celebration. The initial rubric is terse: "The proclamation of the word of God is fittingly carried out in this way" (no. 53). On the one hand this takes away all notions of obligation and absoluteness from the rite's various options; on the other, it takes into account local needs and conditions which make the "first proclamation" of God's word in the new church all the more meaningful.

1. The Exposition of the Lectionary (no. 53)

The lectionary, which in all future celebrations will be carried solemnly in entrance processions—accompanied by lighted candles, incensed, and revered with a ritual kiss—is today reverently held up to the faithful. The honor shown to the book is shown to Christ, incarnate wisdom, the master who speaks whenever the Good News is proclaimed; in this way the display of the book proclaims the primacy of Christ, of his person and Gospel.

The book is held up for all to see by the bishop, indicating that one of his first and chief duties is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and that "the task . . . of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it (*Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 10).

The formula that accompanies the exposition of the book is exhortative and well-wishing:

May the word of God always be heard in this place,
as it unfolds the mystery of Christ before you
and achieves your salvation within the Church (no. 53).

This is an obvious good wish: that the word of God might forever echo in the new church; and that, in a deeper sense, it might open to the faithful the inexhaustible "mystery of Christ" and achieve in the Church the salvation of humanity. In *Ecclesia*, the formula reads, proposing anew a common locution from the rite; in *Ecclesia*, that is, in the authentically sacred place where the Spirit bursts forth, a privileged though not exclusive site where men or women are regenerated "not from a destructible but from an indestructible seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1,23).

2. "He Opened the Book in the Presence of the Entire People" (no. 54)

The rite abounds with such expressions as "*his vel similibus verbis*," "*si casus fert*," "*pro opportunitate*," showing a willingness to adapt the ritual to the occasion. Still, the legislator has laid down a rigid rule concerning the first reading of the liturgy of the word: the first reading is

always taken from the book of Nehemiah 8: 1-4a, 5-6, 8-10" (no. 54). The rule is especially surprising if one considers that it has no foundation in Roman liturgy, is contrary to the principle of substantial freedom in choosing the Mass readings, and allows of no exceptions, even with respect to liturgical seasons.

The pericope of Nehemiah, in fact, must be proclaimed even during the Easter season when, according to tradition, there are no readings from the Old Testament.

The passage from the Book of Nehemiah is to be read in the light of this central idea: the reception of the word creates the community and the liturgical assembly gathers around the word. In this light, we see how all the elements of the pericope come together felicitously in the dedication of a church, a remarkable example of how the ecclesial community—pastors and faithful—is to approach the word of God.

In other words, a moment centered on the proclamation-reception of the Law—considered by exegetes the "moment of birth" of the post-exilic Jewish community—becomes a symbol of the rite in which the community gathered around the Gospel of Christ celebrates the *natalis ecclesiae*, the birth of a church.

The Prayer of Dedication and the Anointings CHRIST, PRIEST AND TEMPLE, VICTIM AND ALTAR

1. The Singing of the Litany of the Saints (nos. 57-60)

In the rite of the 1961 *Roman Pontifical*, the singing of the Litany of the Saints accompanied the entrance of bishop and faithful into the new church, after the solemn opening of the doors. That was the traditional place for this undeniably beautiful chant. Its meaning was obvious: the pilgrim Church on earth made its processional entry into its tent, bringing with it the relics of martyrs and calling upon the saints, its friends and intercessors, the citizens of the heavenly city.

a) The New Place of the Litany

But, as noted, the revised rite has given the privileged place to Psalm 23—a typical "entrance hymn"—as an entrance psalm. This is the proper psalm for the dedication of a church and, recognizing it as such, the rite has secured a deep thematic unity between the moment of the opening of the door and the moment of the entry into the church.

The editors of the rite, however, were confronted with an alternative regarding the Litany of Saints—either to omit it completely or to insert it organically and in a liturgically valid way into another moment of the rite. The second alternative was chosen. The litany has been placed where it was traditionally found in other *ordines* of *The Roman Pontifical*, that is, before the prayer of dedication, as the preparation for it. In this way the litany has reacquired its time-honored place, one closely related to the depositing of the relics.

The Litany of the Saints in this perspective no longer appears as a joyous and intercessory chant of the entrance procession. It has become a moment of intense prayer, of choral supplication, a portico of song opening onto the liturgy of the third and fourth parts of the rite.

b) The Text and Structure of the Litany

In the new Roman liturgy the structures of the sung litany, of the texts, and of the modalities are all traditional.

The supplication is comprised of:

—an admonition with which the bishop introduces the singing of the litany. The text—"Let us ask the saints" (no. 57)—is proposed only as an example;

—the singing of the litany (no. 59);

—the concluding prayer "Lord, may the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary" (no. 60) recited by the bishop.

The text of the admonition and that of the concluding prayer are new compositions. They are formally correct and fitting. They also contain some elements missing in the principal prayers. The second part of the concluding prayer has a proper reference to John 4: 23, a basic teaching of Christ regarding the worship his disciples are to offer the Father:

[a house] where Christians gathered in fellowship
may worship you in spirit and truth
and grow together in love.

The text of the litany is that of the *editio typica*, published in 1969. One petition of the litany is proper to this rite alone: "Make this church holy and consecrate it to your worship." This is a traditional petition which, as in other rites, has been reassigned to the *schola cantorum*. The emphatic triple repetition, however, has been omitted.

The liturgical text is necessarily universal in character—a symbolic projection of the heavenly Church, the propitiator and intercessor for all time and all places. Yet, in spite of the changes noted above, several small rubrics show that the text also recognizes the needs and sentiments of the local Church. At the proper place, the name of the new Church's titular saint is to be added, that of the patron of the place, and under certain circumstances those of the martyrs and saints whose relics are to be placed under the altar. Similarly, among the petitions there will be a place for petitions "which are relevant to the special nature of the rite and the condition of the people" (no. 59)—a small rubric which, within the limits of a well organized liturgy, allows for the possibility of expressing the various needs of the ecclesial community.

2. The Depositing of the Relics (no. 61)

In the rite of dedication the depositing of relics beneath the altar of the new church is, after the celebration of the eucharist, among the oldest significant rites. Testimonies to this effect date back to the first half of the fourth century.

a) The *Passio Christi* and the *Passio Martyris*

Very early, the Church grasped the connection between Christ's sacrifice and that of the martyrs. The martyrs are the disciples par excellence; the *passio* they endured bound them tightly to the *passio Christi*, and made them in an extraordinary way similar to their teacher.

This theological intuition was translated into ritual during the fourth century. At that place where the *passio Christi* is celebrated—the altar—in *mysterio*—it is fitting that there be present relics of the martyrs.

The notion also grew naturally from a meditation on Revelation 6:9, or at the very least was confirmed by that text—"When the Lamb broke open the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the spirits of those who had been martyred because of the witness they bore to the word of God." From that time on, M. Andrieu notes perceptively, "the altar referred to by the seer was no longer the celestial altar but the eucharistic altar under which were to rest those who at the price of their blood had given witness to Christ."

The liturgical custom of placing relics of the saints under the altar rapidly spread in the West and has retained its vigor down to our day. The prescriptions of Canon Law on the necessity of a sacred stone for celebration of the eucharist are well known. Whether in the East or West the holy sacrifice was not celebrated without the presence of the martyrs, witnesses and disciples of the Crucified One; the consecrated tablecloth of the Eastern Church and the holy stones of the Latins, with their tomb reliquaries, assured this presence.

The norms of Canon Law were the last codifications of the practice prevailing after diffusion of the rite of depositing the relics. Obviously there were not enough martyrs' bodies for all the altars that would have to be dedicated, and the Church settled on two solutions. One option was to use "representative relics," such as the *sanctuarium* or *brandea*, objects (usually pieces of cloth) which had been in contact with bodies of martyrs or at least with their tombs; the other solution was to break up the martyrs' bones, a custom at first disapproved by Rome, but which ultimately prevailed, and for which Gallican liturgists found adroit justification. There arose the practice of breaking the martyrs' bones into microscopic particles, placing the fragments in tiny sepulchres; occasionally these were prepared in a series, each relic being deposited in the altar at its proper time. Such customs weakened the original significance of the rite, so that only a pale image of the ancient and very expressive depositing of the bodies of the holy martyrs survived. The liturgical sense of the rite vanished and very often the historical sense as well. There were many instances in which, because of either ignorance or naiveté, relics were deposited whose authenticity was more than dubious. There were also cases in which depositing of the relics destroyed piety, when greed turned relics into objects of venal transactions, of trafficking which was hardly edifying.

The Apostolic See had repeatedly intervened in such instances but these disciplinary measures were not always sufficient to prevent abuses and

assure authenticity of the relics. The situation had come to such a point that from many quarters and for many and varied reasons, the cry went up for revision of the regulations.

b) The New Legislation (no. 5)

In the case of the depositing of the relics, as in many others, one and the same affection for the rite has given rise to two contrary legislations. In the past, veneration for the martyrs made relics obligatory in each and every altar; in our day the very same veneration denies such a need, arguing that reverence demands that relics not be reduced to minute fragments and dispersed in a thousand places. The first step toward a revision of the legislation concerning relics came with promulgation of *The Roman Missal* by Paul VI on April 3, 1969. The *General Instruction*, in fact, attenuates the obligation to use a sacred stone:

"Fixed altars are consecrated according to the rite of *The Roman Pontifical*; moveable altars may be simply blessed. It is not necessary to have a consecrated stone in a movable altar or on the table where the eucharist is celebrated outside a sacred place" (no. 265).

This legislation obviously had immediate consequences for the custom of breaking martyrs' relics into minute particles.

Regarding the depositing of the relics, however, the *Instruction* added:

"It is fitting to maintain the practice of enclosing relics in the altar or of placing them under the altar. These relics need not be those of martyrs, but there must be proof that they are authentic" (no. 266).

Thus the revised rite, although with some modifications, retains the classical custom of depositing the relics under the altar: "It is fitting that the tradition of the Roman liturgy should be preserved of placing relics of martyrs or other saints beneath the altar" (no. 5).

The new legislation on depositing of the relics aims to recover the fullness of the liturgical sign and its historical reality, taking into account the weight of custom. The legislation consists of three paragraphs.

The first deals with that principle which has already been amply illustrated:

a) Relics intended for deposition should be of such a size that they can be recognized as parts of human bodies. Hence excessively small relics of one or more saints must not be deposited.

A number of liturgical scholars very likely may have preferred a more radical solution; but that offered by the rite is sufficient for a more correct practice. Its success will depend on a proper appreciation of its liturgical spirit.

The second paragraph is concerned with assuring the authenticity of relics. It firmly and definitively establishes that it is preferable to dedicate an altar without relics than to deposit relics of dubious authenticity:

b) The greatest care must be taken to determine whether relics intended for deposition are authentic. It is better for an altar to be dedicated without relics than to have relics of doubtful credibility placed beneath it.

The third paragraph concerns correct placement of the relics beneath the altar:

c) A reliquary must not be placed on the altar or in the table of the altar but *beneath* the table of the altar, as the design of the altar may allow.

This paragraph deals with restoring the original sense of the depositing of relics, the only meaning which has complete liturgical value. As commentary on this legislative norm, it is enough to note the text of St. Ambrose quoted in the introduction to the *Rite for the Dedication of an Altar* (no. 5).

"Let the triumphant victims take their place where Christ is the victim. He who suffered for all is above the altar; those redeemed by his sufferings are beneath the altar" (Letter 22, 13; PL 16: 1066).

The admonition was more than justified. In recent times the custom had arisen of so exhibiting the body of the saint that it dominated the altar—a custom at odds with tradition and with a proper liturgical sense.

The rite, it will be noticed, frequently talks of the depositing of the relics of martyrs or *other saints*. The reverence given to the bodies of saints who, though not having suffered martyrdom, have given witness in their lives to Christ, is proper and just; but the rite does not hide its preference for martyrs. With delicate precision it points out: "Although all the saints are rightly called Christ's witnesses, the witness of blood has a special significance, which is given complete and perfect expression by depositing only martyrs' relics beneath the altar."

c) Development of the Rite of Depositing the Relics (no. 61)

In the revised rite, the depositing of the relics is so arranged that it reproduces the essential lines of that sober rite of the fourth century, as evoked in a famous letter of St. Ambrose to Marcellina. There are three moments in the depositing of the relics:

—*the vigil of prayer close to the relics*, which takes place the preceding day: "When the rite of the depositing of relics takes place, it is highly recommended to keep a vigil at the relics of the martyr or saint which are to be placed under the altar" (no. 10). It recalls a moment in the rite of dedication of the Ambrosian basilica by St. Ambrose: "As it was close to evening we transferred them [the bones of Gervasius and Protasius] to the basilica of Faustas. All that night watch was kept . . ." (Letter 22:2; PL 16:1063);

—*the solemn translation of the relics*, during the procession towards the new church: "The procession to the church to be dedicated begins. . . . The crossbearer leads the procession; the ministers follow first; then the deacons or priests with the relics of the saints, ministers or the faithful accompanying them on either side with torches" (no. 31). This solemn

translation corresponds to that mentioned by Ambrose: "The next day we transferred them [the bones] to the Ambrosian basilica" (Letter 22:2; PL 16:1063);

—*the depositing of the relics beneath the altar*, placed there by the bishop: "A deacon or priest brings them to the bishop, who buries them in a suitably prepared aperture" (no. 61). In Ambrose: "Under the altar we bury the sacred remains and carry them to worthy resting places" (Letter 22:13; PL 16:1066).

For the act of depositing of relics, the revised rite proposes singing Psalm 14, introduced by one of the two antiphons: "The bodies of the saints lie buried in peace, but their names will live for ever (alleluia)." Or: "Saints of God, you have been enthroned at the foot of God's altar; pray for us to the Lord Jesus Christ" (no. 61).

The choice of Psalm 14 was probably dictated by the meaning of the *depositio*: the resting place of mortal remains in a dwelling place of holiness and peace, the eucharistic altar. As well, it is a sign of the martyrs' entry, following upon a heroic following of Christ, into the "tent" of the Lord, their resting place on the holy mountain where they will enjoy eternal rest.

3. The Prayer of Dedication (no. 62)

The church and the altar have been symbolically prepared with the *lustratio* and the relics of the martyrs have been placed in the altar. Most important, with the remembrance of the rite of baptism the community of the faithful hears the word of God in prayer. The rites of the dedication work toward a climax: the moment of the prayer of dedication.

a) The Meaning of the Prayer of Dedication

The prayer of dedication, referred to in the Middle Ages as the "consecratory preface," though not actually present in the archaic form of the rite, is nonetheless to be considered a traditional element in the liturgies of East and West.

The community, in attesting its desire to dedicate the new edifice to God alone and for all time, and for the worship due him, does so in the most efficacious way—by prayer.

The prayer of dedication is, in fact, the solemn declaration made by the bishop of the will of the community to dedicate the new church of God: "We come before you, to dedicate to your lasting service this house of prayer" (no. 62). He asks God to be present with his grace, that with his Spirit he might render efficacious the worship of the community in the new church—for the rite of dedication of a church as a whole expresses the conviction that if the Lord does not build his church "they labor in vain who built it" (Psalm 126:1). In this instance, however, the solemn prayer is pure praise as well as thanksgiving, a recalling or anamnesis of the *mirabilia Dei*, and an eschatological projection.

b) The Text of the Prayer of Dedication

In the history of the rite of dedication there developed two consecratory prefaces: the first referred to the church, the other to the altar. The revised rite, taking into consideration the deep unity binding together church and altar—their reciprocal and necessary relationship—has brought together in one prayer of dedication the elements previously found in the two separate prefaces.

The prayer of dedication, *Deus, Ecclesiae tuae sanctificator et rector* (no. 62), is a new composition (a few lines reproduce portions of the Ambrosian preface for the Sunday of the Dedication), but in its structure and terminology draws its inspiration from the classical models.

From a structural point of view, the prayer consists of an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion.

The introduction (lines 1-5) places the prayer in its immediate celebratory context. After the invocation to God, sanctifier of his Church, it presents the exulting community to the newly dedicated church and tersely describes the ends to be served: the church is "this temple of worship, this home in which we are nourished by your word and your sacraments."

The first part (lines 6-22) has four sections. The first (lines 6-10) calls for a meditation on the relationship between the church-edifice and the Church-People of God: "Here is reflected the mystery of the Church." It also presents the Church as faithful virgin, glorious bride, fruitful mother—a marvelous image reminiscent of Mary of Nazareth, a holy icon of the Church. This prayer, as do many other prayers from patristic literature, often alludes to the features of the Mother of Jesus in order to suggest those of the Church. The next three sections elaborate other biblical images: vineyard of the Lord (lines 11-14), temple of God (lines 15-18), city on a hill (lines 19-22). In an anaphoric way each section begins with the words "The Church," followed by an attribute: "The Church is holy . . . The Church is favored . . . The Church is exalted." These sections delineate a salvation history; however, God's loving intervention in history is expressed more in terms of pure praise than chronological exactitude. The prayer is also an admirable song praising the holy Bride of Christ, a song that springs from the heart of a people conscious of its sins. These sins actually stain the nuptial robe of the Bride, but it remains mysteriously unsullied through the purifying presence of the Lord and his Spirit.

The second part (lines 23-27) contains the prayer of invocation of the Spirit, epicletic in structure and terminology: a supplication that the Lord be present with the ineffable sanctifying power of his Spirit, in the church and on the altar; that they become a "holy place" and a joyous "table" for the celebration of Christ's sacrifice, the paschal banquet.

The third part (lines 28-39) also comprises four sections bound together by the adverb "Here", which in anaphoristic fashion scans ternary groups of lines. The general request expressed in the epiclesis is transformed into particular petitions, and separate parts of the ecclesial edifice appear in sequence: baptismal font (lines 28-30); the room for the table

dedicated both to word and eucharist (lines 31-33); the hall in which humanity and angels merge their hymns of praise and supplication (lines 34-36); the place where God's mercy is invoked, and where the liberty and dignity of all are asserted (lines 37-39).

The conclusion (lines 40-41) is very brief. It expresses the trust of the faithful that they will eventually possess the ultimate reality, alluding to the exultant arrival "at the heavenly Jerusalem, at the joyous gathering and assembly of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23). This image, though a frequent one, is particularly apt: it recalls the festive procession by which the assembly of the faithful entered the church, the sign of the Heavenly City.

4. The Sign of Anointing (nos. 63-65)

Three rites follow the prayer of dedication—anointing, incensation, and lighting—which, as the introduction states, "express in visible signs several aspects of that invisible work which the Lord accomplishes through the Church in its celebration of the divine mysteries, especially the eucharist" (no. 16). The three rites have the same structure: a formula offered aloud by the bishop, the effecting of the individual sign, the singing of a biblical hymn or psalm.

a) The Altar, Symbol of Christ

Just as the eucharist is the center of Christian worship, so the altar is the ideal center of the ecclesial edifice: all leads to and all leads from the altar. The altar is the "place of concentration" of the purest liturgical spirituality and the most intense Christian piety.

A text of the revised rite expresses the wish that the People of God make the altar the focus of all religious feeling and activity:

May this altar be the place
where the great mysteries of redemption are accomplished:
a place where your people offer their gifts,
unfold their good intentions,
pour out their prayers,
and echo every meaning of their faith and devotion (no. 46).

The symbolism of the altar is inexhaustible, as are the mysteries it celebrates. The introduction of the rite notes that "in the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ is presented as the High Priest who is also the living altar of the heavenly temple," and quite early in history the altar became the natural symbol of Christ. Turning to the neophytes, St. Ambrose asked himself: "What is the altar of Christ if not the form of the body of Christ?"

The relation between stone and altar—based on the texts of the Old Testament, and on the Pauline allegory, "The rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4)—contributed on one hand to the general use of the stone altar, and on the other to formulation in the patristic age of the current prayer "*Altare Christus est*" ("the altar is Christ").

But "Christ" means "Anointed." How then could the altar become a fitting symbol of the Anointed One without having been anointed? Such considerations suggested the anointing of the altar; but the rite also strove to repeat the actions of the patriarchs when they raised altars to God, as did Jacob who "took the stone that he had put under his head, set it up as a memorial stone, and poured oil on top of it" (Genesis 28:18).

If in the building dedicated to worship the altar is Christ, the stones holding up the walls are Christians (see 1 Peter 2:5). As the Head was anointed with the Spirit, so are the members in the sacraments; as the altar was anointed, so are the stones. The anointing of the new church's inner walls appears as ritual translation of this relationship, and as a second stage in the Christian initiation of the new ecclesial space.

b) One Altar Only

It is fitting that the church have but one altar, and few texts express this as forcefully and convincingly as the introduction to the *Rite of Dedication of an Altar*: "In new churches it is better to erect one altar only, so that in the one assembly of the people of God the one altar may signify our one Savior Jesus Christ and the one eucharist of the Church" (no. 7).

This is not to suggest that the text is a polemic against other epochs, when a different manner of worship and piety occasionally led to an exasperating proliferation of altars. The rite is concerned, however, that in planning new churches there be a return to an older, more genuine custom, the only completely valid one from a liturgical point of view.

The clear affirmation of a principle does not imply, however, the refusal of some reasonable adaptations occasioned by local conditions—the need for greater comfort, a conspicuous oscillation in the size of the congregation. Because of such conditions, one and the same church may have two separate places, each with its altar, where the faithful gather according to number and need; that is, in either church or chapel.

The introduction allows for such a case, and also mentions that "in a chapel, if possible separated to a certain extent from the main body of the church, where the tabernacle for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is situated, another [altar] may be erected where Mass can be celebrated on weekdays for a small assembly of the people" (no. 7).

But it is extremely important that each element in liturgy conserve its primary function and eloquently express that original meaning: the altar is to be built for viewing by an assembly and, according to certain rhythms, the memorial of the Lord will be celebrated upon it. To reduce the altar to a decorative element would be to degrade it: "The erection of several altars in a church merely for the sake of adornment must be entirely avoided" (no. 7).

c) The Rite of Anointing

The symbolic riches of this rite, and the usefulness of noting some of its new or modified elements, lead one to dwell on this section more than on any other.

A Concelebration. The rite of dedication is presented as a great concelebration of the entire local Church—bishop, priests, deacons, various ministers, and the faithful. Among them, the bishop, the “high priest of his flock,” is the celebrant of his hierarchic place. The priests are with him and after him. As they collaborate with the bishop in the pastoral service of the Church-People of God, so they concelebrate with him in the dedication of the church-edifice—above all in celebrating the eucharist, the climax of the dedication. The rite of anointing is another instance of concelebration.

This particular concelebration is one of the innovations of the revised rite. The rite, however, does not prescribe it, leaving the bishop to choose at his discretion. However, the option should be chosen for, in addition to shortening a long liturgy, it underlines the ecclesial meaning of the rite.

If the bishop opts for the “concelebration of the anointing,” the principal anointing, that of the altar, is his; the priests have responsibility for the minor anointings, the walls.

The Anointings. In prior pontificals the anointing rites were performed in a circular sequence—the left wall, door, right wall, altar—in general, the movement going from minor to major points. In the revised rite the anointing begins at the altar and continues with the walls; this more clearly builds to a climax, and manifests a deeper sense of the mysteries involved. *In re*, anointing of the members takes its meaning from the anointing of Christ the Head; *in signo*, anointing begins with the altar, symbol of Christ, and proceeds to the side walls, symbols of Christians, stones of the Church.

The anointing of the altar is a simple and solemn rite. The bishop initiates it with a supplicatory prayer which refers to both altar and church: “We now anoint this altar and building. May God in his power make them holy, visible signs of the mystery of Christ and his Church” (no. 64).

There is an obvious correspondence here, classical in its Roman eucharology, between the visible action performed by the Church (“we now anoint”) and the invisible action of God (“in his power make them holy”). The altar and church, marked with the same chrism, become an expressive sign of the mystery of Christ and his Church, that is, of “the Anointed One” par excellence and his anointed people.

But the act of anointing is even more eloquent than the formula. The revised rite prays that the sign of anointing be rejuvenated in its fullness: “Then he pours chrism on the middle of the altar and on each of its four corners, and it is recommended that he anoint the entire table of the altar

with this" (no. 64). The rubric proposes the integral version of the prescription of the German Pontifical: "From the blessed oil the bishop forms the cross in the middle of the altar and on the four sides . . . and anoints with his hand the entire altar with blessed oil" (nos. 52-53, p. 144).

The anointing of the walls follows that of the altar. The rite has retained the traditional use of twelve anointings, recalled in the twelve crosses—attached to or sculpted in the walls—which are a clear allusion to the twelve apostles: "The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14).

The rite, however, foresaw that it would be excessive to place twelve crosses on the walls of some smaller churches, and offers another possibility: four anointings only, with four valid symbolic meanings. These anointings, radiating from the altar to the four cardinal points, symbolize the lordship of Christ over the entire universe. More precisely, as the rite suggests, the four anointings associate the sacred edifice more closely with that image of the heavenly Jerusalem found in the Book of Revelation, where the city appears "in the shape of a square, its length equal to its width" (Rev. 21:16). There are cultures for which the square is the symbol of the perfection of the Absolute.

During the anointing of the walls, Psalm 84 is sung (no. 64), the song of intense yearning for the house of the Lord. In the rite, the song of the pilgrim becomes the canticle of the bride, yearning for the porches of the heavenly temple.

The two proposed antiphons accompanying the psalm do not belong to the antiphon tradition of the *Rite of Dedication of a Church*; still, they express very fitting concepts. However, it would have been better had one of them, at least, referred to the anointing.

The first antiphon reproduces Revelation 21:3. In the liturgy the consecrated church prefigures the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, the splendid dwelling place of God with humanity: "See the place where God lives among his people; there the Spirit of God will make his home among you; the temple of God is holy and you are that temple" (no. 64).

The second antiphon is of Pauline inspiration (see 1 Cor. 3:9). The liturgy of the hours uses it in the Common of the Dedication of a Church, at midmorning: "Holy is the temple of the Lord, it is God's handiwork, his dwelling place, alleluia" (no. 64).

In the finished building, the Church recognizes the symbol of the Church which grows and develops by the Lord's action: he is planter of the vine, architect of his house.

5. Fire and Incense (nos. 66-68)

For many centuries, down to our day, the most moving part of the entire rite was the blessing of the incense. On five points of the altar signed with holy chrism there burned five crosses made of wax and grains of

incense. The altar became a field of fire from which arose dense clouds of smoke and fragrant balsam. During this the schola sang the solemn *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* while the entire assembly—clergy and laity—remained kneeling, listening intently to the singing, in silent prayer.

Of the first altar Scripture says: "Noah built an altar to the Lord . . . he offered holocausts on the altar . . . the Lord smelled the sweet odor" (Gen. 8:20-21). At a very early time, incense, because of its fragrant spirals, became the symbol of that sacrifice performed on the altar: the rising to God in an acceptable way. Israel, in organizing its worship, used incense as the ritual scent frequently and abundantly.

Fire consumes the victim. In the chronicles of Israel there is the vivid memory of the "fire come down from heaven" to consume the sacrifice that Elijah, true prophet, had offered to the true God (see 1 Kings 18:20-40)

Fire and incense: it was inevitable that, at some point in the history of the rite, these two elements should become part of the altar's symbolic meaning.

But there were two objections to the incensation as it developed over the centuries. From one point of view, it tended to make the faithful erroneously believe that this part was the culminating point of the entire celebration. From another point of view, it appeared to draw its content almost exclusively from the schema and themes of the Old Testament. To solve these difficulties those who revised the rite came to the following conclusions.

—The incensation, justifiable in its natural and biblical symbolism, was to be retained. Those parts, however, which altered its meaning or gave it undue importance were to be removed (the solemn invocation of the Spirit, the entire congregation on its knees). Thus, in deference to *veritas rerum*, any disproportion between the deeply touching beauty of the incensation and the actual importance of its content would be corrected.

—The ritual elements (gestures and texts) were to express a decidedly christological and ecclesial content; thus their spirit would not seem principally indebted to that of Old Testament liturgy.

Fire and incense, in fact, are valid symbols from a New Testament perspective: fire recalls the Holy Spirit, that fire sent upon the Church by Christ, risen and seated at this Father's right hand (see Acts 2:1-3). This is the very same fire that consumes the eucharistic sacrifice on the altar. The fragrance acceptable to the Father is that which comes from Christ's Easter sacrifice, as we read in St. Paul: "Follow the way of love, even as Christ loved you. He gave himself for us as an offering to God, a gift of pleasing fragrance" (Eph. 5:2).

The Book of Revelation (5:8; 8:3-4) says that incense—besides symbolizing the "acceptable fragrance"—is also a symbol of prayer that rises to God. The assembled faithful are incensed prior to the edifice. This ritual sequence suggests that the "temple of God" where we are to offer

"spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1) is the individual baptized Christian and, at the same time, the entire assembly.

The formula pronounced by the bishop before the incensing is a composite one: "Lord, may our prayer ascend as incense in your sight. As this building is filled with fragrance so may your Church fill the world with the fragrance of Christ" (no. 66).

The first part (lines 1-2) is from Psalm 140:2; the second is a new text which, in light of the relationship between Christ and Church, and of the traditional parallelism between "edifice" and the People of God, prays that the Church impart the fragrance of Christ to all (see 2 Cor. 2:14-15).

The theme of the angel who brings to the Most High the prayers of the just, and abides in the temple near the altar of sacrifice—a traditional biblical theme—accounts for the choice of Psalm 137 (no. 68) and the antiphons. The texts are particularly appropriate in a liturgy of incense, recurring periodically in the rites for dedication of a church.

In Psalm 137 particular attention should be devoted to verses 1-2: "In the presence of the angels I will bless you. I will adore before your holy temple."

The vision of the angel who "came in holding a censer of gold" (see Rev. 8:3-5), a symbol of the prayers of the saints who hasten the coming of the Great Day, has provided the material for the antiphons, well known in the Roman liturgy: "An angel stood by the altar of the temple, holding a golden censer". Or: "From the hand of an angel, clouds of incense rose in the presence of the Lord" (nos. 69-70).

The altar has been honored with incense. Now other signs follow so that it might efficaciously express its original function as a table of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:21), around which happily sit the sons and daughters who share the table with Christ. The prayer of dedication of the altar joyously proclaims this meaning: "Make it [this altar] a table of joy, where the friends of Christ may hasten" (no. 48).

The time has come, therefore, to cover the stone with a white cloth, to decorate with flowers, to light lights and sing hymns of glory.

It would be wrong, however, to believe that the "rite of light" has only a decorative function at the banquet table. It has a deep theological meaning: Christ is the "light of the world" (John 8:12), "a revealing light to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32), the only true light of the Church. That light prefigures the last condition of the human race, proper to the heavenly Jerusalem (See Rev. 21:10, 22-23).

To this point the rite has not mentioned light. Indeed, there are frequent rubrics prescribing that lights should not be used in procession—neither in the entrance procession, nor in that formed for the proclamation of the Gospel. The symbol of light is deliberately saved for this particular point, the moment of praise to Christ the light. The rubric notes: "There the festive lighting takes place: all the candles . . . and the other lamps

are lit as a sign of rejoicing. Meanwhile the following antiphon is sung . . . [or] another appropriate song may be sung, especially one in honor of Christ, the light of the world" (no. 71). Even the text of the rubric is infused with the luminous joy of the moment.

The bishop pronounces a formula which recalls the Easter Vigil's diaconal admonition concerning the lighting of candles. Taken as a whole, however, the formula is a virtual synthesis of Chapter 1 of the *Constitution on the Church*: "Light of Christ, shine forth in the Church and bring all nations to the fullness of truth" (no. 70).

The church resplendent in light is a symbol of the Church, illumined by Christ, and of the heavenly Jerusalem whose lamp is the Lamb. But the hymns which accompany the festive lighting also call forth a clear missionary vision which, flashing forth from the words of the bishop, is mirrored and amplified in the Canticle of Tobias and its lyrical antiphons:

Your light will come, Jerusalem;
upon you the glory of the Lord will dawn
and all nations will walk in your light, alleluia;
Jerusalem, city of God,
you will shine with the light of God's splendor;
all people on earth will pay you homage (no. 71)

The first antiphon is a thematic synthesis of Isaiah 60:1-3, the classic text for the solemnity of Epiphany and for missionary celebrations because of its universal perspective.

The second antiphon is derived from Tobias 13:11, 13. The canticle of Tobias is a prophetic hymn of Jerusalem's destiny, and an expression of the exiles' hope in the ideal City of God. In the context of the dedication of a church, the canticle becomes the prophecy of the Church's perennial mission: "Nations will come from afar . . . they will be gathered together to praise the Lord"

The Liturgy of the Eucharist THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY CONSECRATES THE PLACE FOR THE EUCHARIST

In ancient Roman liturgy the dedication of a church consisted essentially in celebrating the eucharist. No doubt, when the Church came to consider which rites were required for the dedication of a church, it realized that no rite could be as "dedicatory" and meaningful as celebration of the eucharist. This was not only because the eucharist is the deepest expression of the Church's worship, but also because the entire ecclesial edifice was structured for celebration of the Lord's memorial. In celebrating the eucharist on this occasion, *mysterium*, (mystery) *factum*, (fact) and *signum* (sign) corresponded perfectly. *In mysterio* the Church is constantly oriented toward Christ; *in facto* the assembly concentrates on the action of the celebrant; *in signo* all things converge towards the altar—walls and apse, roof and ceiling. That very altar appears to be sheltered

and highlighted by the architecture, gathered in at the apse and opening out toward the nave. The church is where the congregation meets; similarly, its altar is the center of the union between Christ and Church, where the oblation is unique and all comprehensive. The entire dedication of a church was brought to completion in the dedication of an altar, which in turn was completed with a particular celebration of the eucharist.

In the revised rite too the church is dedicated by a celebration of the eucharist. The rite itself is in effect a eucharistic preparation which now comes to its climax. It should be emphasized that a perfect seam unites the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and the *Rite of Dedication of a Church*.

On this matter the introduction points out:

—for when the eucharistic sacrifice is celebrated, the chief end for which the church was built and the altar erected is attained and manifested by particularly clear signs;

—furthermore, the eucharist, which sanctifies the hearts of those who receive it, in a sense consecrates the altar and the place of celebration, as the ancient Fathers of the Church assert more than once: "This altar is an object of wonder: by nature it is stone, but it is made holy when it receives the body of Christ";

—finally, the bond whereby the dedication of a church is closely linked with the celebration of the eucharist is likewise evident from the fact that the proper preface of the Mass is, as it were, an integral part of the rite of a dedication of a church.

1. A "Situating" Celebration of the Eucharist

The eucharistic celebration, then, today as yesterday, is the central fact in the dedication of a church. But this eucharist is "situated" or "placed" in a given context—that is, in a *statio* where all of the local Church is gathered together—bishops, priests, faithful—to express its wish to dedicate (*voluntas dicandi*) a building, open to all the faithful, which will be reserved always and exclusively for the celebration of divine mysteries and other ecclesial activities. The *voluntas dicandi* with its social, communal, and concrete aspects, constitutes the human and ecclesial presupposition of the dedication of the new church.

To dedicate a church edifice to God is to effect a rite with which the Church assembly recognizes God's absolute lordship over it according to the Pauline formula: "All things are yours! . . . All these are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:22-23). It is a lordship that exalts humanity as one hears in the well-known expression of St. Irenaeus: "The glory of man is God; man is the receptacle of the works of God and of all his wisdom and virtue."

2. A Significant Structural Readaptation

Over the centuries, it cannot be denied, the importance of the eucharist with respect to the dedication of a church had weakened; the rubrics of

The Roman Pontifical were such that the celebration of the memorial of the Lord seemed almost a complementary part of the rite. In the 1888 *Roman Pontifical*, for example, the bishop, after having blessed the altar cloths, ". . . goes to the sacristy where he takes off the cope. If he wishes to celebrate, which is more fitting, he puts on the pontifical vestments . . . Mass is said as in the Missal, for the dedication of a church." Having returned to the altar, the bishop, as if nothing had developed up to that point, began Mass with the prayers at the foot of the altar. The 1961 *Roman Pontifical* brought about a substantial reform in this part of the rite, a noteworthy change considering the times, but one that was still deficient in expressing the central function of the eucharist in the dedicatory rites. Here are a few examples of how the 1961 *Roman Pontifical* established a closer tie between the celebration of the Mass and the dedication of a church:

—the phrase "if he wishes to celebrate" of *The Roman Pontifical* (1888) becomes "it is fitting that he celebrates the Mass, although he may designate another priest to do so";

—it is expressly declared "in the Mass of the dedication the act of consecration of a church is part of the entire rite of consecration";

—from the rubrical point of view the omission of certain acts preparatory to the Mass is prescribed: "When the celebrant comes to the altar he makes a reverence and immediately kisses it, omitting the Psalm *Iudica me, Deus* and the confession with the verses and prayers."

But these minor reforms were still far from restoring the eucharist to the position that tradition and liturgical integrity demanded.

Today's pontifical has restructured the *Rite of Dedication of a Church* so that the entire celebration is a unified and unique rite, articulated in the typical sequences of the eucharistic preparation. Those parts of the dedication which, according to the General Instruction of *The Roman Missal*, are parts of the Mass, appear in the rite according to their original disposition, but as characteristic moments of the rite. The third part, for example, is the prayer of dedication and the anointings, and its content is directly related to the dedication. Yet this part harmoniously blends with the other elements of preparation of the gifts in the eucharistic celebration—a result of its place (after the homily) and its immediate end (preparation of the altar).

This close and harmonious fusion of all the elements of the one celebration constitutes one of the principal merits of the new rite.

3. The Texts

The euchological texts of the fourth part, and of the section that corresponds to it in the *Rite for the Dedication of an Altar*, are new compositions. Born from one clear intuition, they are characterized by a clear geometrical structure and by a strong thematic unity, even when the theme is considered from various points of view and developed according to different perspectives. They do not, consequently, result in a kind

of "liturgical collage," even though an attentive reader could recognize in each line one or more liturgical, biblical, or patristic sources.

One trait of the eucharistic prayer should be emphasized. The preface contains an explicit mention of the dedication: "With hearts full of joy we consecrate to your glory this work of our hands, this house of prayer." The preface of the dedication of an altar states: "Therefore your people have built this altar and have dedicated it to your name with grateful hearts." The two expressions are similar not only in their phra-seology; they express, in this arrangement, the very same idea.

Some might consider the mention of the dedication in the preface as an anomaly. It is not, however, if viewed in the light of that particular celebration termed "situated eucharist." Though it is not necessary at this point in the eucharistic prayer, mention of the dedication does serve to make explicit what the eucharist effects or brings about: the dedica-tion.

4. A Meeting Point

The new *Rite of Dedication of a Church* is the point of arrival where, after a long journey through history, various tensions have been dialectically resolved. Quite significant for the life of the Church has been its understanding of the relationship between altar and eucharist; this understanding, in fact, is the key to the history of the rite of dedication. The value of the eucharist, and its meaning in the dedication of a place, marked it as the primary rite. Similar profound reasons led to prepara-tion of both the altar for eucharistic sacrifice and the site where the altar was situated.

In the high Middle Ages, Rome (*Ordines Roman XLII*) and the Churches in Gaul (*Ordines Romani XLI*)—independently of one another—sought to unify elements from very different sources. When that attempt suc-ceeded, even partially, the moment marked the birth of the *Rite of Dedi-cation of a Church* as a composite rite. The long history of the rite is nothing more than the history of the integration and development, not always harmonious, of two diverse but not contradictory concepts: (1) it is fitting to prepare properly the place where the eucharist will be cel-ebrated; (2) the eucharist sanctifies the place where it is celebrated. Me-dieval and recent simplifications are an index of how one or the other tendency prevailed. In the new rite there is a moment which can be con-sidered the point of contact between the two approaches: the moment of the veneration of the altar. When all the preparatory rites have been completed, the bishop goes to the altar and kisses it. The Mass continues: significantly the work "*prosequitur*" (continues), not "*incipit*" (begins), is used (no. 73).

The kiss of the altar with which every eucharistic celebration begins had been deferred because the altar was not ready; now the altar, having become the sign of the Anointed One and decorated as a joyous Easter table, is ready to receive the ritual gesture of veneration with which every eucharist begins and ends.

5. The Inauguration of the Place for the Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament (nos. 79-82)

This point has been stressed: in liturgy, the ritual moments must correspond to the genuine aspects of the mystery, or of the sacramental acts in which it is reflected, as well as satisfying the real needs of the community. Pure symbolism gives birth to purely empty gestures. With this realistic, sane notion of liturgy the brief liturgical sequence known as the Inauguration of a Blessed Sacrament Chapel, a sequence not found in previous rites, is more easily understood.

The sacred species, the body and blood of the Lord, are on the altar to be distributed as food and drink to the faithful. But according to a very ancient tradition they are also to be kept in the church for later distribution to the sick (above all, as Viaticum for those in their last agony), and as a reference point and meeting place for adoring silent prayer. The authoritative instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* of May 25, 1967 points out in clear synthesis the motifs and modalities for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

It is not the presence of the reserved sacrament that makes the church "sacred" and makes of it a *domus Dei* in the genuine sense of the work; nonetheless, the reservation of the blessed sacrament is a precious good for the spiritual life of the community. Since the sacred species are to be reserved, they are brought to the place prepared for the reservation of the blessed sacrament; and this is done in the usual way, with a very brief procession to the place. In this way the place of reservation is inaugurated by using it, just as the bishop had inaugurated the chair by sitting in it, and the reader had inaugurated the ambo by proclaiming from it the word of God.

The rite does not provide in this case for the blessing of a tabernacle but suggests a moment of silent prayer, the sign-gesture that fittingly corresponds to one of the ends of the eucharistic reservation.

Even if this rite has no precedent in the tradition of the rites of dedication, this sober rite reflects one of the aspects of the mystery, and responds to a real need of the community. The discretion of the rubric is noteworthy: "The inauguration of a chapel where the blessed eucharist is to be reserved, is carried out appropriately in this way . . ." (no. 79).

CONCLUSION

The rite has an exemplary structure, a very clear logical line—not of a cerebral logic, cartesian or mathematical, but the logic of Mystery—faithful to the Roman tradition, a rite that in a very natural way inserts itself, in a spirit of truth, into the rites revised after the Second Vatican Council.

As noted, the doctrinal riches of the *Rite of Dedication of a Church* are explicable above all in terms of having been inspired by the rich repertory of antiphons. The antiphons—drawn mostly from the bible, though

without a preconceived plan—appear as incisive and lyrical theses. The psalms that accompanied them, read in an ecclesiological and christological key, complete and enrich the rite's theology. The doctrinal content of the euchological texts, by comparison, was more tenuous. In not a few of them the motifs, proper to the *lustratio*, were excessive.

In the revised rite the situation is turned upside down, so to speak. In a celebration which has been notably simplified, the place given to the antiphons and psalms is necessarily smaller; the euchological repertory, by contrast, is noticeably increased.

The *Rite of Dedication of a Church* is a biblical, liturgical pageant of many temples: the cosmic temple that tells of the glory of God; the tent-temple of the days of Exodus; the temple of Jerusalem; the temple that is Christ, the only necessary one, the only absolute one in which is achieved the perfect oblation, and in which the Spirit dwells in its plenitude; the temple that is his Church built with living stones; the temple that is each faithful soul, a primordial *templum Dei*; the temple of the consummation, the ultimate temple of the last and final City. And this great pageant is brought together and evoked in the temple of stone, the smallest of them all, whose glory is to be a sign and a reverberation of the glory of the others.

The *Rite of Dedication of a Church* is also an admonition to experience and live above all else the sacredness of the Church assembly, for as Pope Paul VI states, "If a church is the place of the divine presence, this place is the assembly of the faithful, is the soul of each believer." But this thought is also an admonition not to underestimate the value and function of the holy space of the ecclesial edifice. No theologian, no biblical scholar, no liturgist can think of the church edifice as the earthly dwelling place of God whom "the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain" (2 Chronicles 6:18). It is nonetheless true, as Pope Paul VI reminds us, that "there wings over the temple a presence, the presence of God," and it is that presence on which all the doctrine and actions converge: the altar table, the baptismal font, the tomb of the martyr and the eucharist tabernacle, the icon of the Virgin Mary and the pictures of the saints; and still more the Word proclaimed and the sacramental actions celebrated. All the rites performed in the church, according to their original ends, culminate in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Father and the service of humanity. All summon forth the Presence.

Above all the rite attempts to manifest, and by manifesting, unveil, the mystery of Christ and Church: "May God in his power make [this altar and this building] holy, visible signs of the mystery of Christ and his Church" (no. 64). What else does this formula express but the wish and prayer of a thirst that can never be quenched?



