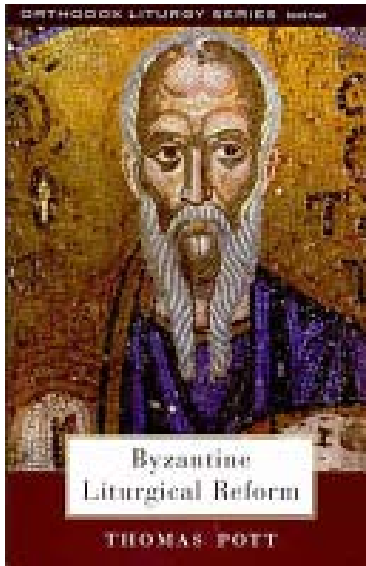


Thomas Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform: A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition*, Translated by Paul Meyendorff, Book 2 of the Orthodox Liturgy Series, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2010, 293 pp. ISBN: 9780881413434



By Dn. Lasha Tchantouridzé

The Orthodox Liturgy Series by St Vladimir's Seminary Press is a praiseworthy effort by the publisher initiated to provide "an insightful, accessible, and lucid interpretation of the theology, meaning, and function of the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church." The current volume, Book Two in the series, consists of seven chapters divided between two parts. Part One deals with liturgical reform as "the concept and a taxonomy." Part Two discusses "historical paradigms" behind Byzantine liturgical reforms.

The author, Thomas Pott, is a monk of the Monastery of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Chevetogne, Belgium, and Professor of Liturgical Theology at Sant'Anselmo University (a Benedictine university and college) and at the Oriental Institute in Rome. The Chevetogne monastery has a chapel of an Eastern or Byzantine (more precisely, the uniate) rite and monks of corresponding persuasion. Pott approaches his subject not only within a historical context of the liturgical life of the Eastern Rome, but he also tries to develop a theoretical framework starting with the concept of reform itself. Employed in a variety of

contexts, the concept of reform in this book is understood in the spirit of renewal. The author views the liturgy as a “new wineskin,” containing the ever renewed “wine which *today* quenches those who thirst for God” (emphasis in the original, p. 14). Reform, a delicate and complex question, is also very difficult to define and agree upon, especially within the context of Divine Liturgy. Pott borrows a definition of reform from Gerhard Ladner (*The Idea of Reform*, 1959): “the idea of free, intentional and ever perfectible, multiple, prolonged and ever repeated efforts by man to reassert and augment values preexistent in the spiritual-material compound of the world” (p. 25). Overall, the author engages in a long discussion of the phenomenon of reform mostly citing Roman Catholic scholars.

Pott identifies the 9th century as the decisive in Byzantine liturgical reforms, when the Studite monastic initiatives started to define the church life following the final defeat of the iconoclastic movement. Igumen St Theodore of the Studion Monastery wished to maintain the classical elements of the cathedral rite of the Great Church of Constantinople as well as preserve those of Sts Sabas and Basil. The Studite reforms primarily dealt with the Euchologion (prayer book) and the Horologion (the hours). Further, the Studite monks were also very prolific in the area of hymnography. They prepared the essential groundwork for the 10th century development of the Lenten and Paschal Triodion, the Octoechos (the eight tones), and the Menaia. The Studion Monastery also contributed to the development of the Typikon or the texts that regulate the use of liturgical texts proper. Especially interesting is the Studion Monks’ treatment of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts: they established to celebrate liturgy in the morning, at noon or in the afternoon (at the 3rd, the 6th or the 9th hour) depending on their work, meal, and prayer schedule. This could not have been a liturgical reform per se, but a decision to follow the practice that had already existed in cathedral parishes (p. 135). Furthermore, the monks of the Studion Monastery, not surprisingly, devoted due attention to the Great Lent, and the veneration of the icons – the “Studite era” emerged from the protracted iconoclastic struggles and contributed much to the Triumph of Orthodoxy – the final overthrow of iconoclasm proclaimed in AD 843.

According to the author, “the Byzantine liturgy, as it is known and practiced today, originates in the synthesis between the Palestinian monastic tradition and the Constantinopolitan cathedral tradition” (p. 153). Chapter 5 of the book primarily concentrates on certain aspects of the evolution of the services of the Holy Friday and Easter. According to Pott’s research, the service of the Holy Friday first emerged in Jerusalem sometime in the 4th century (the 380s), and was closely tied to the veneration of the Life-Giving Cross. Due to Muslim Arab invasions, the Cross was transferred to Constantinople in the 7th century by Emperor Heraclius. As a result, the Cross veneration practice on Holy Fridays ceased in Jerusalem for some time, and commenced in Constantinople on a larger scale, now spanning three days before Easter. Pott provides other similar examples of the churches of Jerusalem and Constantinople influencing each other’s practices, that is, until Jerusalem was lost indefinitely to the Muslims in mid 7th century. He also notes the increase of authority and role of monks in the church following the iconoclastic era. The author seems to think that in the Orthodox Church of Eastern Rome there was a sharp distinction between what he calls “the monastic rite” with a centre Jerusalem, and “the Cathedral rite” with a centre in Constantinople – he even speaks of the “regime change” following the Muslim invasions and capture of Jerusalem and the end of the iconoclasm. However, he fails to demonstrate this sharp difference between the two, except for some hymns and rituals. Despite such conceptual shortcomings, Pott’s “analysis of the development of three elements in the services of Holy Friday and of Easter” is quite good (pp. 174-195) – it discusses important issues and contains interesting facts.

The author devotes a separate chapter to the service of *proskomidia* or prothesis. The chapter titled “the prothesis rite” traces various aspects in the evolution of this service from the 7th century on. He addresses such issues as the meaning of *proskomidia* in relation to the Great Entrance, introduction of the lance, mixing of wine and water, adding of warm water, the multiplication of particles and their arrangement. Pott cites Father Alexander Schmemmann who has noted that human intervention is a constant and traditional factor in the history of the liturgy, but unfortunately, not all interventions are marked with

proper theological knowledge and historical perspective. Indeed, certain interventions that took place around the service of prothesis could have been rather dubious – *proskomedia* was probably less conservative than Divine Liturgy, as it is generally ‘hidden’ from the eyes of the faithful, it is essentially a service of the clergy, the faithful could not immediately approve or challenge changes in the service; and therefore, it was likely more open to alterations and reforms.

The final chapter of the volume appears to be both unfortunately titled and out of place: “Reforms in the “Slavic Liturgical Periphery” during the 17th Century.” The chapter addresses important issues of the reforms by Pētr Moghila in Kyiv (Kiev) and Patriarch Nikon in Moscow, and the disaster that was the Union of Brest of 1596; however, none of these specifically belonged to “the Byzantine period,” and the Brest union would not have happened had Constantinople survived the onslaught of the Turks in 1453. Identifying Moscow and Kyiv as “Slavic liturgical periphery” is even more puzzling, let alone the obvious difficulty with the concept of “liturgical periphery:” how could something that is supposed to be divine could have peripheries? The brief chapter only provides outlines for the reforms in Kyiv and Moscow, and the very reason of their inclusion in the book is never entirely fully explained – it is likely that a rather dubious geopolitical claim of Moscow as ‘the third Rome’ is taken by Pott seriously (it is curious that he does not identify Constantinople as ‘the second Rome,’ and judiciously calls Eastern Romans ‘Byzantines,’ although they never identified themselves as such).

Byzantine Liturgical Reform does raise and discuss some interesting issues, but volume’s conceptual coherence and organization remain pose significant problems throughout. In the final analysis, the author addresses more reforms of liturgical scholarship, rather than Divine Liturgy itself. Although the demarcation line between the two could be blurred by what people know (scholarship) and what people practice (*liturgeia*); practical reforms cannot not be identified as such without learned theoretical opinions prepared in advance that at some level have to be “free, intentional and ever perfectible, multiple,

prolonged and ever repeated efforts by man” (p. 25). Therefore, those learned men who prepared or planned reforms or promoted them first studied the practice of liturgy and also *meaning* of its various parts. In other words, they took scholarship about liturgy and proposed to change the practice in order to affect its meaning. Naturally, some changes historically have occurred in practice of liturgy without anyone laying and preparing theoretical groundwork, but such changes evolving organically could hardly be called “reforms,” as Pott himself acknowledges it, as the concept of reform and its working definition adopted in this book necessarily imply planned and purposeful change, no matter how minor or imperceptible the change might be.

There are a couple of other unfortunate issues associated with the concept of liturgical reform. The concept of reform; although it implies fine tuning and measured change without upsetting the basics, still it carries a connotation that such fine tuning applies to the whole of a phenomenon rather than to only some of its parts. Altering of the whole of liturgy, of course, has never been either a design or an effect of any reform whether in Byzantine times or after. The second issue that may trigger a misunderstanding among some readers is the essence of the Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, which is defined by it serving as a bridge or a link between this kingdom and that of God – this essence has not been affected by Byzantine or any other reform either.

To call the contributions by St Theodore the Studite to liturgical life “the Studite Liturgical tradition” or “Theodore’s liturgical tradition” would be an exaggeration as clearly the good monks of the great monastery of the Eastern Rome had no intention to start a new tradition, but indeed, to recover the liturgical practices tarnished by iconoclasm, and to enrich liturgical life further. Pott speaks of the “regime change” from Jerusalem to Constantinople, in fact, he insists firmly on it (p. 169); however, he fails to demonstrate that there was a *regime* (a form or political rule or order) in place to start with. Even if there was a regime, the change that lasts from the Muslim invasions of the 630s to the end of iconoclasm in the second half of the 9th century, i.e. spans for more than two centuries, appears to be more natural and organic, tied with historical and

geographic changes in the region rather than forced or directed by a political force.

Pott's understanding of the concept of "rite" is even more ambiguous as he distinguishes sharply between the "monastic" rite of Jerusalem and the "cathedral" rite of Constantinople. He asserts that there was "the difference in *spirit*" (emphasis in the original, p. 169) between the two. The sum of the differences; however, boils down to the nature and quantity of hymns, services of the hours, and general typikon provisions. If these are to serve as criteria to distinguish among the rites, one could argue that the Orthodox Church by the 9th century had hundreds of rites, and by now it probably has thousands, as such differences abound in the Church. In such a scheme of things, "rite" loses its meaning – classifications based on quantitative differences never produce reliable criteria, even if there were anyone capable of reliably tracking down and cataloguing such differences. Would a difference of three hymns, for instance, be enough to qualify a new rite? If not, would the fourth hymn make a difference? If yes, why four and not three? What about hymns or prayers performed in different languages in the same service?

Although not quite consistent and rigorous, riddled with many problems, and massive conceptual difficulties, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform* by Thomas Pott is nevertheless noteworthy and educational. It is very likely to benefit specialists in the area, students of Orthodox Christian liturgy, and the Orthodox clergy – the volume reviews some very important practices and debates surrounding them. However, more general audience may be confused or inadvertently misled by the book as its chief value is to be found not in the offering of a finished product, but in its ability to raise important questions, prompt curiosity and show venues for further research.

About the reviewer: Deacon Lasha Tchantouridzé, PhD, teaches church history at the St Arseny Institute, Winnipeg, MB.