

Chapter 11

Cases of Casuistry Concerning Propriety and Order in the Church

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Introduction (p. 1135)

It pertains also to the duty of a church's minister to observe decent order in sacred affairs. For instance, it's the minister's duty to make sure that the things which take place in his location, during his time, are done well. For this reason St. Paul advises that all things *be done well and according to good order—properly and orderly* (1 Cor 14:40). Propriety is the opposite of frivolity. Order is the opposite of confusion. No frivolity, no confusion ought to be brought into the house of God whose caretaker is the minister of the Word. Gregory of Nazianzus says, *Order has arranged and connected all things together. Order holds together heavenly things and earthly things. Order has a place in those things in as much as they are understood by reason and the mind. Order has a place in those things in as much as they are perceived by the senses. There is order among the angels. There is order among the stars in respect to their movement, size, mutual relationships, splendor, etc. Order also plays a deciding role in churches so that some are sheep, others are shepherds; some are in charge, others are underneath them and in fact are to obey them. Another illustration of this is that one person is the head, another the feet, another the hands, another the eyes, another is some other certain body part for the harmony and advantage of the whole church—either in a lower way or in a more outstanding way.*

In particular here, order looks at especially the rites of a church in its sacred obligations in which there ought to be no confusion or anything that causes offense.

This part of ecclesiastical duty is indeed one main concern. Another concern though presents itself in a less certain way concerning which now, God-Willing, I will treat briefly.

Case #1.

Question: Can any minister of a church change the ceremonies of his church by virtue of his own decision making?

Answer: Divine worship can't exist without ceremonies although ceremonies aren't a part of worship but only of that part which might be called assisting props or ornaments so that a white vestment may be freely used or omitted for a gathering. The administration of baptism may be done by sprinkling or immersion. In the use of the Lord's Supper the bread may either be broken or not broken. The host as they call it may be administered even as bread in another form. Singing may be done in German or Latin, in the music of a single individual or a choir, and of this kind of matter many others things may be done. Concerning these issues Augustine's rule must be observed (epist. 119. ad Januar): *We see to it that wherever I have established things that are not in opposition to faith or good morals and they have something to encourage a better life, or wherever we can become acquainted with things that have already been established, not only do we not condemn those things, but we also follow the example of others by commending and imitating them—if the weakness of others does not especially prevent it with the result that there would be further harm.*

However, you might find other pastors who lead for their own praise. And they place part of their prestige in this—namely if they change in their own church those things which have been used from ancient times and introduce new rites. They might do this either because they know that they are in use in another place or because they themselves want to be seen as having invented something new.

I judge that these pastors sin grievously. Here's what I mean. First of all, they are not lords, but servants of the church according to what the Apostle says in 2 Cor. *We are not lords over your faith, friends.* Therefore, those who place a new yoke upon the church with their new and unusual rites are not in their right mind.

Next, because this issue touches everyone, everyone ought rightly to attend to it. If therefore in rites, for which the entire church is responsible, anyone thinks that something must be changed, this will happen rightly with a consensus of all the ranks of the church's people.

Furthermore, those things which have pleased the entire church at any time and which for a long time have been peaceably used are not changed by one man without rashness, since it is doubtful what change is able to be tolerated with tranquility. For according to the oft-quoted saying (?) [πολυθρόλληζον]: *Every change is dangerous.*

In addition, because that unexpected change is done by the instigation of one man, it's not without offense. For as Augustine says (epist. 118. ad Januar): *Mere change of custom, even though it may be of advantage in some respects, disturbs people because of its novelty. Therefore, if it is of no advantage, by its unprofitable disturbance it is consequently harmful.*

Therefore those things which are not in opposition to good morals or faith, no one dares to revise them without trouble. But that which he finds in another church, this he holds in reserve—for every novelty is suspect.

Where the use of white vestments is the custom for a gathering, the minister himself who has recently arrived also uses them. Thus also this is the case concerning the use of the host, the singing of a choir or an individual, candles in the use of the

Lord's Supper and similar things which have nothing either of impiety or offense. *In regard to this entire kind of thing (says Augustine), a person has liberty to observe or not to observe; and there is no better rule for a wise and serious Christian in this matter than to do whatever he sees the church doing wherever it is that he happens to arrive.*

Nevertheless it can happen that a change of some rites may be necessary. 1) When the rite does its work in a manifestly ungodly way, as it is with the religious veneration of images and statues, processions with the sacrament, the rosary and similar things.

2) When the rite conflicts with articles of faith or with something God has ordained, as happens in the sacrifice of the mass and in the changing of the symbols of the sacraments.

3) When the rite is superstitious. Of such a kind is the consecration of foods, waters or candles which have no profitable use but are superstitious and very much a part of ungodliness.

4) When the rite conflicts with Christian freedom. This happens when that which is indifferent by itself nevertheless is thrust upon the church as necessary—something which can in no way be changed. For this is contrary to the nature of rites which, although they are not to be changed lightly, nevertheless are of themselves free observances, which are able to be changed when consensus of all the church's ranks has been reached on the matter.

5) When the most recent rites either offend or burden our conscience, that is, whenever they put on a certain outward show or imitate things (in order to avoid

persecution), as if our religion isn't really that much different from the Pope's, or at least as if our spirit isn't really all that inconsistent from his.

In all these matters a faithful minister of the church ought to be encouraged to diligently instruct his hearers and to advise them in how many ways a change of such rites might be necessary and advantageous, and also so that all classes of people might not think about repealing or changing things. Certainly however, the minister doesn't do this by himself and in private. For if he constructs out of solid foundations, then he will easily discover those who approve of his opinions and those who are agreed on changing things.

Case #2.

Question: Whether a minister of the church ought, according to the command of a magistrate, to immediately consent to a change or introduction of some ecclesiastical rite.

Answer: Just as a minister of the Word is able to change nothing in ecclesiastical ceremonies by his own initiative, so also a magistrate alone, or with a few others, ought not to force upon the church new rites, particularly ungodly and superstitious ones. For the magistrate also is not lord of the church, but a member and is equally ruled by the Word, etc. Therefore, orthodox men have always persistently resisted such a magistrate who has wished to bind the church with his own commands to that which was oppressive to consciences and had the appearance of collusion, just as once upon a time pious men spoke against Constantius, Valentinus, and similar people. This was also done piously and beneficially at the time of our own fathers during the Interims.

Pious rulers among God's people have understood this very well. Joshua, David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and similar leaders, when undertaking a reformation of the church, did not just dictate by their own imperial authority whatever seemed best to them. But they gathered popular assemblies and with the counsel and consensus of all ranks, since it concerned a matter of the church, they reached a conclusion as it's recorded in Jos. 24, 1 Chr. 14:26, 2 Sam. 7, 1 Chr. 18, 2 Chr. 30 & 34.

There is no lack of contrary examples of those leaders who ran into very severe punishments when they changed ceremonies at their own pleasure and not without scandalizing the people, just as the example of Gideon attests. Gideon made a linen ephod and established his own private worship in his father's house (Jud. 8). Then there's Saul who was sacrificing contrary to the prohibition of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 15). Also there was King Uzziah who was burning incense contrary to the prohibition of the priests (2 Chr. 26). Likewise there was King Ahaz who substituted his own altar at his own place in Damascus for the far away altar of the LORD. There he worshipped and not without the appearance of idolatry (2 Kgs. 26:14-15). Likewise there was King Jeroboam who picked out priests from the most contemptible of the people and established a festival unheard of until that time (1 Kgs. 12). All these men were severely punished on account of these wicked deeds into which their eager enthusiasm and presumption hurled them.

For this reason it's advantageous and necessary that, when a change of some rites must be undertaken, it should not be attempted by either the minister alone, or by the magistrate alone. Rather consultations concerning this matter should be established with all the ranks of the church having been assembled, just as the Apostles

themselves and godly leaders such as Constantinius Magnus, Theodosius, Martianus, Carolus Magnus and similar men convened Synods for religious business. By no means, however, did they, by their own authority, put a noose on consciences through their own novelties.

Moreover, when the decrees of the Council of Trent, which desired to force upon Germany a change of religion and ceremonies, were published, the electors, princes and other ranks of command who embraced the Augsburg Confession placed themselves in opposition to them in public writing in the year 1563. They indicated very serious reasons why they didn't wish either to acknowledge or attend that Council.

If in fact a magistrate violently introduces new rites by the abuse of his own authority, nobody is bound to observe them. However, these innovations must be rejected humbly and this given as proof: *We must obey God rather than men* (Act. 4:5).

Case #4

Question: Whether anyone ought to be at all worried about every kind of conformity of rituals in all or individual churches.

Answer: Uniformity of rituals in the church is urged in different ways by certain people. For example, by the Papists it's urged as if it's absolutely necessary for a common order to be preserved in the church, yes indeed, so that certain rites are, as it were, the marks of the true church. For thus writes Bellarmine (*lib. 2. de sacram. Effectu, cap. 31*): *If the observance of ceremonies were free, it could not be accomplished at all that any order and uniformity in the church would be preserved.* And a little later he says: *Epiphanius, at the end of his books against the heretics,*

enumerates the ceremonies of the Church in order to indicate as it were certain marks by which the Church might be discerned from the abominable sects.

Others, however, have thought, in respect to uniformity of rites in individual churches, that it's greatly conducive to proving agreement in doctrine.

But without reason on both these sides of the argument does anyone worry about conformity of all ceremonies in every church. For here it must be distinguished between divine ceremonies and human ceremonies. The divine ones are those which have their origin from Christ or the Apostles, especially concerning the sacraments, where certain things were commanded by Christ—namely that he commands to baptize with water, to eat bread and to drink wine, to add prayers and similar things which are signs out of the words of institution. And these ceremonies are called necessary and essential in the administration of the sacraments. For this reason they cannot be changed but must be uniformly retained in all churches because they have been prescribed in the institution.

Certain things, however, have the testimony of Scripture because they were employed in early Apostolic church—such as the unfolding of the doctrine of the sacraments, the exhortations, the prayers, expressions of gratitude, etc. These things must also be retained in so far as they are in conformity to the doctrine. For the sacraments are not silent spectacles, but they were instituted in order to strengthen faith and put forward the promise clearly.

Human ceremonies likewise are of two kinds. Certain ones have been added by pious and highly devout men and they are composed either of words or of outward gestures. Ceremonies of words are retained when the words of Scripture are in

conformity with them—so that when the exorcism is applied in baptism, Satan is renounced by the fathers, there is question and response, confession of faith, etc. Ceremonies of gestures are retained, but only in so far as the nature of all adiaphora carries them—that is, freely, and when they have nothing of impiety nor are useless games, when they serve order and propriety in the church, and when they serve as useful reminders and are for the edification of the people. *However, certain ceremonies have their origin out of the papacy and are superstitious, occasionally even ungodly, by which the sacraments are clearly transformed into another performance as in the papistic mass.* To this point pertains the paschal candle, the consuming of salt, the mixing together of water with the wine, the consecration of baptismal water, anointings with oil, candles, and many others things of this nature which neither have a command nor an example in sacred Scripture, and which don't just behave as signs or things which are useful reminders, but in fact are meant to truly confer another special efficacy to the sacraments. Such ceremonies, although some of them seem to have the testimony of antiquity, nevertheless on account of superstition and impiety, into which they've degenerated today, must be eliminated from the churches. Otherwise apart from these considerations it's proper for a few rites of the church to be decent and useful.

In addition, this emendation of rites happens freely of course, but not without restraint, that is, not in private by whosoever pleases to do it, nor by the pastor or the magistrate alone. Rather, on account of the danger of schism, it is done by the consent of all ranks of the church. Also let the church be informed in an open meeting concerning the reasons for the emendation so that nothing is done lightly.

Moreover, although uniformity of human rites is established in all the churches, no one ought to worry about this too much since this goal of conformity is neither necessary nor advantageous. For the unity of the church does not consist in the unity of rites, but *in faith and spirit* (Eph. 4:3). On the other hand churches must not ever be condemned on account of the diversity of ceremonies either. There are ceremonies that have been freely observed even though certain aspects have been repealed or given up. Such things include the sampling of milk, honey and wine, etc. Also for example, some people fast on Saturday. Others don't. Some people partake of the Lord's body and blood every day. Others receive it only on certain days. There are other examples of this kind of practice which a person is able to observe.

With respect to all these examples of different practices, a person has freedom to observe them or not. And there is no better rule for a wise and serious Christian in this matter than to do whatever he sees the church doing wherever it is that he by chance happens to arrive at. *For if a particular practice is not contrary to the faith or good morals, it must be regarded as something indifferent*, and in fact must be observed for the sake of those people among whom one lives, just as Augustine says about this matter (*epist. 118. ad Januar*).

In addition, since this conformity of rites smacks of papism, this is what Bellarmine urges as the marks of a true church in the passage cited above. But he does this without any reason. We on the other hand have decided that it is preferable to overthrow this position with Christian deliberation. We have a role to play in this so that we do not suffer a yoke to be placed upon us with things that are otherwise indifferent

with the result that there is no longer any power left free to us to arrange ceremonies in a different way.

And to what end should one be worried about a necessary conformity of ceremonies in all churches since all ceremonies are human inventions (we're dealing with human rites here) and are neither beneficial nor necessary for the worship of God? And besides, they are changeable by their very nature and are often changed on account the different conditions or circumstances of a church.

This is also what the Augsburg Confession says in Article VII—that we have determined that it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and not that human traditions, that is, either rites or ceremonies, instituted by men should be everywhere alike.

Also the Formula of Concord, Art. X affirms: *We believe, teach, and confess also that no church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the sacraments, according to the well-known saying: Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.*

Case #5

Question: A minister can't justly bury those who were adherents of the religion of a false church, if they died in their error, with proper ceremonies as he would other orthodox people, can he?

Answer: Burying people pertains also to order in the church. This responsibility belongs chiefly to the ministerium. Even if, according to the words of Augustine (*City of God*, Book 1, chapter 12.): *The care of funerals, the arrangement of the grave, and the solemn processions of those going along for the committal offer more comforts for the living than benefits for the dead*; nevertheless proper burial is a testimony of the deceased—namely that they were true members of our church joined together with us in unity of faith. This faith is faith in Christ which awaits the resurrection to eternal life with us. This is that end goal in which the Patriarchs and godly rulers once sought to be gathered to their fathers with whom they had lived in unity of faith.

From this it logically follows that those who do not confess the true doctrine which resounds in our churches, but are rather its enemies and persecutors, must also not be properly buried among us.

Nevertheless, where a distinction must be made between those who were simple wanderers led astray, who held their error in private, who were prepared to yield to those who taught better things, these people must be endured with gentleness. And if they were then to pass away in their simplicity, they must not be deprived of proper burial. *For who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls* (Rom. 14:4). However, those who live among us and defend their errors not only tenaciously but also either through underground channels or through candid boldness create divisions, they disassociate themselves from the fellowship of our churches even while they're still alive. Consequently we are commanded to avoid them (Rom. 16:17, Act. 20:30). Thus also after death they deservedly find no place among us but are to be buried as fools.

Scripture approves of this, where God himself distinguishes between the burial of the godly and the ungodly. The Lord threatens an idolatrous people (Jer. 16:4): *They will die of deadly diseases. They will not be mourned and they will not be buried. But they will be like a dung-heap over the face of the earth. They will perish by sword and famine. Their corpses will become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.* Likewise it was foretold in 1 Kings 21:23,24 to the Baal worshipers Ahab and Jezebel just what kind of proper burial they were going to get. It was fulfilled in 2 Kings 9:33. The same thing happened to Johoiakim (Jer. 22:18). Ungodly King Jehoram's death is described in 2 Chronicles 21:19. It follows that, since he walked in the worst ways of the idolatry of King Ahab, his father-in-law, he met a horrible kind of death. He was indeed buried in the city of David, but not in the tomb of the kings. Nor did the people build a fire for him according to their funeral custom as they did for his fathers. So also Jason, the apostatizing Jewish High Priest, died a poor, banished man in the foreign land of Egypt (2 Maccabees 5:9).

Next, Scripture mentions how God, as a just judge, will order the bones of idolaters to be dug up from their graves and burned, just as it was foretold concerning godly King Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2—that *he is going to dig up the bones of the idolaters and burn them on top of the altar*, just as it was done in 2 Kings 23:16. Another example of this is the case of the adherents of Almericus. Their bones were dug up from their tombs and scattered here and there on dung-hills as it's told by Vincentius (libr. 29. c.107.). And yet at the direction of the papacy wrong things were often done to many people under the pretext that they were heretics.

Third, the holy fathers believed that granting proper burial for the ungodly would result in a greater degree of their own harm. For as Gregory says: *If those whom grievous sins weigh down are buried in the church, this will lead to a greater increase of their condemnation rather than to their release.* Also Augustine says: *For those whose sins have not been remitted, they aren't able to receive any benefit from the fact that they were buried in a sacred place after death. This is the case because those whom grievous sins weigh down, even if they see to it that they are buried in sacred places, it still stands that they are condemned for this very presumption since sacred places do not set them free but rather accuse them of the crime of temerity.*

In addition, proper burial should not be granted to stubborn and determined heretics in the same place where well-known orthodox confessors of the truth are laid since this could not happen without scandalizing others. For after all, does anyone not hold all religions in common if someone may be joined together with true Christians even after death no matter what he or she actually believes?

Therefore proper burial among us should not be refused without just reasons and firm examples of the orthodox practice for those who oppose us and have been led astray by others. This practice which also pertains to order in the church must be observed.

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