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Leading Benedictine Liturgist dies at 93

Father Godfrey Diekmann influenced post-conciliar liturgical reform

Liturgist **Father Godfrey Diekmann, OSB**, died February 22, the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. He was 93.

As editor of *Worship* (formerly *Orate Fratres*) beginning in 1938, Father Godfrey strongly influenced the reform of the liturgy for decades. He also taught theology at St. John's University, Collegeville, and retired in 1995.

Father Diekmann was a *peritus* (expert) at the Second Vatican Council along with **Monsignor Frederick McManus**, long time professor of Canon Law at Catholic University and first executive secretary of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy [BCL]. Both men were also founding members of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, and both exerted unparalleled influence on the post-conciliar reform of the Liturgy.

As reported in his obituary in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Diekmann "helped move the Catholic Church" to celebrate Mass in English, and "helped usher in new ways of Catholic worship".

He was also an ardent supporter of inclusive language in the liturgy, women's ordination and a married clergy - the latter two positions denounced and resisted for centuries by the Catholic Church. Catholic University in Washington, D.C., banned him from its summer faculty in 1962. Later, however, he accepted an honorary degree from the school.

("Prominent St. John's monk dies at 93", *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, February 23, 2002)

Father Diekmann's views on these matters are amply documented in a 1991 biography, *A Monk's Tale*, by **Sister Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ**, longtime ICEL member, past president of the North American Academy of Liturgy and advisor to the BCL, former professor of "word and worship" at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, now superior of her religious community Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in St. Louis. The biography was published by The Liturgical Press, owned by the Benedictines of St. John's Abbey.

A "remembrance" of Father Diekmann by **Father Ronald Krisman**, former executive secretary of the BCL, was published on the Collegeville web site a few days later. Father Krisman noted their friendship during the 1980s and 1990s when the US bishops held week-long sessions at Collegeville concerning plans for the liturgy, and from 1990-97 when both Diekmann and Krisman were members of the Advisory Committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy [ICEL].

I will most remember Godfrey for an incident that occurred on the last day I saw him. The ICEL Advisory Committee had a meeting in Rome on June 4-10, 1996. Godfrey made it to the meeting, although he was hobbling somewhat and using a cane. On the evening of the day our meeting had concluded, we received notice that we were invited to Mass with Pope John Paul II in his private chapel the next morning.

The next morning we met at Saint Ann's gate. Godfrey arrived in a cab - I believe he had been staying at Sant' Anselmo while in Rome. When we were taken into the Holy Father's chapel, the Pope was already there at his *prie-dieu* and chair facing the altar. We were all seated behind the pope - facing his back and the altar. But Godfrey - because of his physical condition and because, as I remember, he was that day celebrating the 60th anniversary of his ordination - was seated on the raised platform upon which the altar stood. He was facing us - and the pope, as well.

After communion [sic] of the Mass, when the pope was back at his *prie-dieu* with his back to the rest of us, Godfrey was hunkered down on his stool, resting with both hands on his cane. He was staring intensely at the pope. It almost seemed to be rude. After Mass, we asked Godfrey why he had been staring down the pope in such fashion. He replied, "You all know that I am not happy with much of that man's leadership of the Church. For that, I don't like him. But I was not STARING at the pope. What I was doing was WILLING MYSELF TO LOVE HIM" (*original emphasis*).

A photograph of the occasion Father Krisman described was also published on the Abbey web site.

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