



THE ROMAN RITE old and new

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The Roman Rite: Old and New - VII

The New Mass and the Cult of Men: liturgy “etsi Deus non daretur”

In the seventh installment of Don Pietro Leone’s “The Roman Rite: Old and New”, the author begins the second part of his study, trying to find out the deepest motivation for the New Roman Rite. What happens when a liturgical rite is based on the cult of man, instead of the religious worship of Almighty God - and how does it compare to the apostolic motivations of an immemorial rite?

II The Cult of God and the Cult of man

We proceed to search more deeply into the motivation for the New Rite. We do so by searching more deeply into its theology, namely Protestantism. Now the essence of Protestantism is subjectivism, as has been clearly demonstrated by Jacques Maritain in his book “Les trois Réformateurs” (Plon, 1925) in the chapter “Luther ou l’avènement du moi: Luther or the Coming of the Self” and by Paul Hacker in his book “Das Ich im Glauben bei Martin Luther. Der Ursprung der anthropozentrischen Religion: The Self in the Faith of Martin Luther: The Origin of Anthropocentric Religion” (nova & vetera, Bonn 2002). And subjectivism in the realm of liturgy amounts to the cult of man.

The Mass is the cult of God, the highest form of cult that exists, and both rites render this cult to Him. But whereas the Old Rite renders it in a way that expresses in a sublime manner this cult of God, the New Rite renders it in a manner that expresses the cult of man.

That the theology of the Old Rite relates to the cult of God and the theology of the New Rite relates to the cult of man is evident at the outset in the central conception that each has of the Mass: the conception of sacrifice in the first case, and the conception a community meal in the second. For this sacrifice is “the sacrifice of God, by God, to God” (in the words of St. John of the Cross), and this meal is the celebration of the community by itself.

We shall now compare these two different forms of cult on various general counts, and then in regard to the proper of the Mass.

A. General Comparison

1. The Orientation of the Celebrant

In the first part of this essay we have examined this theme in relation to Protestantism, we shall now do so in relation to the Cult of man.

In the Old Rite the priest celebrates towards the crucifix and (typically) towards the tabernacle as well. With very few exceptions (see the corresponding section in Part I above) he faces the same direction as the people, who are situated behind him. This orientation expresses the fact that he performs a cult to God for, and on behalf of, the people.

In the New Rite, the priest celebrates towards the people. Man faces man and “the circle is closed” (in the words of Cardinal Ratzinger in “The Spirit of the Liturgy”). This orientation nourishes the misconception that the Mass is being offered exclusively or primarily for those present, whereas it is in fact offered in the first place for God, in the second place for the entire Church, and only in the third place for particular intentions and for those present.

In this way, the Mass is seen as a matter for the ‘community’ rather than for the Church: for a specific group of persons at a specific place and time rather than for the Communion of Saints in all places and at all times.

This misconception has led to the elimination of the salutationes (or greetings), the final blessing, and the *Ite Missa est*, where the priest celebrates without a server; it has led to the reformulations of *Orate Fratres/Pray Brethren* (referring to the Church) as “pray brother(s) and sister(s)” or “pray sister(s)”, according to circumstances; it leads to some priests not celebrating Mass if there is no-one present, for example on their holidays.

This orientation encourages the priest to act as a performer, it expresses or prompts the desire on the part of the congregation to be looked at individually, to be addressed, to see and hear everything, to understand everything immediately. It fosters an anthropocentrism which culminates in taking God Himself into their own hands.

The tabernacle is situated outside the circle[1], as is the (real) altar, and the divine character of the Mass, that is the Transubstantiation and the Sacrifice, is thereby obscured, so that God is excluded from the celebration, or at most relegated to second place. Moreover, the celebrant typically celebrates the Mass with his back to the tabernacle[2], which is the clearest expression of the shift from the cult of God to the cult of man.[3]

The Mass, in a word, becomes the celebration of the community by itself, where “the word ‘celebration’ evokes a party atmosphere rather than the due performance of a public, (primarily religious) ceremony” (MD p. 145). Priest and congregation greet each other with secular formulae in contrast to the Old Rite, where the celebrant, after kissing the altar which represents Christ, greets them with *Dominus Vobiscum* without looking at them, so expressing his role as mediator between God and man.

In the New Rite again, members of the congregation greet each other (at the “sign of peace”), and phenomena characteristic of public entertainment enter the scene as we have noted above: laughter, applause, and even dance.

2. Gravity

We see how the gravity appropriate to the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Death of the Lord gives way to joyfulness. What is the source of this joyfulness? The sense of a community meal recalling the agape gatherings in the early Church? But, as Cd. Ratzinger explains, these gatherings, which in the earliest times were joined to the celebration of the Mass, were soon afterwards recognized to be substantially different from the Mass and were consequently separated from it.

Or does this joyfulness derive from a sense of the Last Supper? But as Romano Amerio points out in *Iota Unum* (ch.270), the Last Supper is informed rather by a spirit of tragedy.

Or does it derive from the commemoration of the Resurrection, since the Mass is also this? And yet the Mass is not essentially the commemoration of the Resurrection, but essentially the commemoration (in the sense of rendering present) of the Sacrifice of Calvary.

It is probably the commemoration of the Resurrection which is the source of the joyfulness of the New Rite (in line with the remarks in the following paragraph), but if this is so, then we must admit that it is not a form of joy that befits the Resurrection, because it is often merely superficial when not positively infantile, whereas what befits the Resurrection is a profound spiritual joy, as manifest in the Easter hymns *O filii et filiae*, or *Haec dies* (the former paraliturgical, the latter liturgical): a spiritual joy in the latter instance which we may describe as equally profound as the sorrow that the Church has experienced at the Death of the Lord.

This “obsessive paschalism” (Critical Study V 3) may be seen in the shift from black vestments to violet vestments in the liturgy of Good Friday and in the Requiem Mass[4]; it may be seen in the suppression of the prostration of the sacred ministers at the beginning of the former and the suppression of all the most profound prayers and sequences of the latter, to the extent that the Requiem Mass may be said no longer to exist. It may be seen equally in the lighting of the Paschal candle at the modern funeral Mass, and the chanting of the Alleluia of the Easter Mass in almost all sung Masses throughout the year which contain the Alleluia verse - even in Lent and at Christmas[5].

3. The Sacred

We have already referred to the suppression of the sacred language in the Offertory and in the Canon of the Old Rite, and to the suppression of prayers expressing the finalities of adoration and expiation. We have also referred to the suppression of the Latin, the silence, and of the many signs and gestures of reverence towards the Real Presence.

When discussing the dissolution of the sacred, as the cult of God shifts towards the cult of man, we should also mention the drastic reduction of genuflections, bows, and signs of the cross on the part of the celebrant over the oblata, the sacred species, and with the sacred species. For

example, all the seven signs of the cross over the oblata immediately proceeding the consecration of the chalice have been excised in accordance with the instruction *Tres Abhinc Annos* of 1967 (MD p. 39) in exact parallel to the excisions made by Cranmer in his communion service of 1552[6].

4. The Rubrics

The rubrics determine the manner in which the Mass is celebrated. The rubrics of the Old Rite determine (inter alia) the celebrant's movement from one part of the altar to another; the three depths of bow he makes according to whether he recites the Confiteor, says the doxology or the Holy Name of Jesus, the name of the saint of the day, or greets another participant in the liturgy, and so on; they determine the direction of the bow: to the tabernacle, the crucifix, the missal, or an image of a saint; they determine the position of his hands on the altar, their height and distance apart when he prays, their height when he raises the oblata.

Behind these rubrics lies the truth taught infallibly by the Church that the Mass is the cult of God, and in particular makes present the unique Sacrifice of Calvary by the action of Our Lord Jesus Christ. As the cult of God, the liturgy of the Mass needs to be determined by rules and duly ordered; as a rendering present of the unique Sacrifice of Calvary, it needs to be uniform through time and space; as an action of Jesus Christ it requires self-effacement on the part of the celebrant: his person is not important, but the person of Jesus Christ in Whom he acts: he himself is not important as a person but as an instrument[7].

The rubrics of the Old Rite have been suppressed in the New Rite[8] (including all those mentioned above). Many parts of the *Novus Ordo Missae* are now optional; readings can be changed at will; the celebration has become informal, casual, and more free. The person of the celebrant has taken on a great importance. In a word, it is no longer duly ordered, uniform, and celebrated with self-effacement as befits its objective nature.

What is the reason for this? Is it not the aversion of "the man of to-day" to the objective order in general - be it dogma, the moral law, or rubrics? a shift from the objective to the subjective, from theocentricism to anthropocentricism, and in the present context from the cult of God to the cult of man?[9]

5. A Perfect Work

In the previous section we have stated that the Mass is the cult and action of God. As such it is a perfect work which man has always sought to celebrate in a perfect manner (*humano modo*): with the highest degree of beauty of which he is capable: in the architecture, sculpture, paintings, frescoes, and music: all created by the greatest masters that the world has ever known; in the sacred vessels, vestments, incense, and flowers; and in the solemn ceremonies that befit the court of the King of Kings. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the Papal Mass as it was before the liturgical changes: the Papal Mass, which has been named "the

highest achievement of Western civilization”, the Mass which in all its glory served as the model for every other form of Mass down to the simple low Mass with one server.

With the introduction of the New Rite, the pursuit of perfection and beauty has been by and large abandoned. It has been replaced by a form of reductionalism or minimalism; by a rationalism which views the Mass as the mere performance of a function or the conveying of a concept.

As for the aesthetic consequences, one need only think of the architecture, art, altars, stained-glass windows, and sacred vessels of modern churches, the man-made fibres of the vestments, and the music which has descended from the sublime heights of Gregorian chant to the level of folk-song[10].

At the same time, beautiful altars and altar-rails have been smashed into pieces[11] and thrown away like symbols of a past worthy only of being despised and trampled underfoot; and the Papal Mass in the form that it has known for two millennia has been abolished, and reconstructed on the model of the new simple Mass. We are witnessing a shift away from the canons of objective beauty hallowed by the Church’s Tradition to the canons of functionalism of a secular society. This is the shift from God to man which terminates in nihilism.

In so far as ideology is involved, it is the ideology of poverty, but a poverty not wedded to beauty and sacrality, as in the great monastic and mendicant traditions, but rather divorced from them, so that it no longer corresponds to the Divine nature of Christ, but only to a heretical image of Christ as mere man.

As Michael Davies says (p. 294): “the enemies of the Church have often contrasted the richness of Catholic churches with the poverty of the people in certain countries. It was Judas who condemned Mary Magdalene for anointing Christ with precious ointment which could have been sold to help the poor. It is frequently the poorest of God’s people who are the most generous in making sacrifices to ensure that their churches provide a fitting setting for the Holy Sacrifice - and in doing so receive solace which makes endurable a life that might otherwise have been more than could be borne”.

6. Contemplation and Devotion

The Council of Trent (Section 22 ch. 5) declares that Holy Mother Church has established “ceremonies such as mysterious blessings, lights, incensations, vestments, and many other such things, to bring out the majesty of such a sacrifice and to awaken the mind of the faithful...to the contemplation of the sublime things hidden in this sacrifice.” We may observe that what is said of contemplation is true also of devotion, and conclude this section by considering briefly the effect of the respective rites on the minds and hearts of the faithful.

We have considered above the suppression of such elements as the signs of the Cross and beautiful vestments. Since such elements not only express and enhance the majesty of the Holy Sacrifice, but also serve to raise the minds and hearts of the faithful to God, it follows that their suppression has impoverished the Mass both in itself and in its effect on the faithful present.

As an important example of such elements, we take Gregorian chant. Gregorian chant for a sung Mass comprises both the setting of the parts of the proper (that is, the Introit, the Gradual, the Alleluia and verse, the Offertory and the Communion) as well as the Kyriale (that is, the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei). We shall see how a considerable part of this patrimony has been eliminated or mutilated, and how the rest has been badly adapted to the liturgy.

Since many texts of the proper have been changed in the New Rite (cf. the next section) and the Gradual has been entirely abolished, the respective Gregorian compositions have in effect been eliminated[12]. In regard to the Kyriale, the Kyrie and Gloria are no longer obligatory (according to the rubrics of the Old Rite) and hence more rarely sung, and the Kyrie has been mutilated (as we shall see shortly).

Moreover, Gregorian chant does not in general adapt well to the new rite, either spiritually (as we are contending in this second half of the essay) or liturgically.

In regard to the latter point, this chant has not been integrated into the body of the Mass. While in the Old Rite the celebrant performs liturgical actions during the singing of the Introit, Kyrie, Offertory, Gradual, Alleluia, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and the Communion, in the New Rite this is impossible. He must say each prayer out loud, then pause while the choir sings it, and only thereafter continue to celebrate the Mass.

We shall now examine in particular the sequences *Dies Irae* and *Libera Me* from the Requiem Mass, and the prayer *Kyrie Eleison* from the Common.

The first two sequences rank amongst the greatest treasures of western civilization: Mozart said that he would have willingly given his entire musical opus in exchange for the opening bar of the former of them. In the liturgical reform both sequences were suppressed.

The prayer *Kyrie Eleison*, established with a three-fold repetition a thousand years ago, was replaced by a two-fold repetition, thus mutilating not only the liturgical text but also its setting in Gregorian chant[13]. What liturgical principle, may one ask, is operative here? That of suppressing elements “reduplicated in the course of the centuries or added without particular utility” (SC 50)? Or that of composing “rites resplendent with a noble simplicity, clear in with approval their brevity, avoiding repetitions” (SC. 34)? - two passages quoted with approval by Mgr. Bugnini in “*La Riforma Liturgica*” (I.4). If so, the reformers seem to be unaware (quite apart from the Trinitarian significance of the three-fold form of the *Kyrie Eleison*) of the liturgical principle of repetition, whether in order to instruct, as in the one-year cycle of readings, or in

order to move the heart, as here. They rather seem to regard liturgy, as contended above, as simply a matter of performing a function or conveying a concept.

We see how it is that profoundly moving texts in a sublime musical expression conveying to God man's anguish, suffering, misery, and sinfulness, and bringing him profound consolation[14], have been suppressed or mutilated. Man's insistence on his unworthiness to receive The King of Kings under the roof of his soul has been silenced. This is no longer the cult of God where man's heart is touched by texts, music, and repetition, but the cult of man: a shallow cult where the existence of suffering and sinfulness is not even acknowledged.

If it is indeed true that the spirit of the *Novus Ordo Missae* is the cult of man, then it follows that the more blatant abuses that we have witnessed in the liturgical devastation[15] of recent times, such as those described by Michael Davies in his chapters on "The President as Actor" (ch. 8), "The Children's Directory" (9), "Send in the Clowns" (10), and "Bring on the Dancing Girls" (11), are not accidental to this, but rather a consequence of its internal dynamic and a manifestation of its very spirit[16]: a spirit which culminates in liturgy conceived as though God did not exist: "etsi Deus non daretur." [17]

[NOTES:]

[1] either directly behind the celebrant on the high altar, unless (perhaps sometimes because of the inappropriateness of this position) it has been removed from this, the most honourable, place in the church (cf. *Iota Unum* 270 p.596), to some side area.

[2] "This arrangement recalls the 'abomination' deplored in Ezechiel 8:16, where the priests sacrifice with their backs turned to the *Sancta Sanctorum*, the Holy of Holies...whereas in a Catholic church we are dealing with the *Sanctissimum*" (*Iota Unum* 291 p.646).

[3] In fact the objection that in the Old rite the celebrant celebrates with his back to the people should be met with the rejoinder that the deepest significance of all things is determined by their relation to God, and that in the Old rite the celebrant faces God, whereas in the New Rite he has his back to God.

[4] In more recent years, violet has not seldom given way to white as the colour for funeral vestments, corresponding to the heresy of universal salvation which we note in our discussion of the mistranslation of "pro multis" as "for all men" etc. below, and which is also fostered by the absence in the new eucharistic prayers of the petition that God might preserve us from eternal damnation. This same theory often finds expression in funeral addresses suggesting that the dear departed (even if not a practising Catholic) has already attained Paradise, and in the cards commemorating the death of a friend or relation which no longer ask for prayers for the repose of their soul.

[5] Lack of logic is of course typical of radical subjectivism.

[6] As a testimony to the sacrality of the old rite we note its power to touch the hearts of young, innocent children, as well as the youth. Young people have confided to the author that only after having become acquainted with this rite were they able to understand the authenticity of Catholic moral teaching and to remain faithful to it. As a further testimony we refer to the effects of this rite on the inhabitants of a small island in the Pacific: on arrival at the island, a missionary immediately called all of them to the sea-shore and proceeded to celebrate the Mass. The inhabitants had never encountered Christianity before, but simply by attending the Mass they understood that it is a Holy Sacrifice offered to God.

[7] A similar anthropocentrism exists in the case of the sacrament of confession. In the old form, the priest sits and the member of the faithful kneels, representing their respective status as judge and accused: the sacrament is described as the sacrament of penitence; the penitent does not look at the priest (invisible behind the grate) whose person is not important, since he acts in persona Christi. Instead he looks at the crucifix, source of God's merciful forgiveness. Altogether the encounter is not human but sacred, as befits the sacrament. In the modern form by contrast, the member of the faithful faces the priest, as though they were on terms of equality, an equality also expressed by the modern term: the sacrament of reconciliation; the penitent looks at the confessor and a personal rapport is created, as psychological and emotional elements enter the arena, including human respect. There is no external sign of penitence, of the presence of a judge or a redeemer. Altogether the encounter is human rather than sacred.

[8] St. Theresa of Avila said that she would have been ready to die to preserve the least of the rubrics of the Holy Mass. How many times would she not have had to die in these years of change!

[9] See the sections on human expressiveness (284), the principle of creativity (285), and the movement from the sacred to the theatrical (286) in *Iota Unum* as examples of this subjectivism.

[10] "...those ineffable Gregorian melodies...the fruit of the most elevated and sublime Catholic inspiration; admirable melodies from which we have departed, only to fall into something barbarous, believing that it was possible to substitute the melodies so easily...or in order to throw oneself into a type of music which is completely profane, something which constitutes the most repugnant contrast in comparison to the sanctity of the place, the majesty of the words, and the holiness of the mysteries." Dom Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Institutions*.

[11] In this brutal and indiscriminate destruction, reminiscent of the worst excesses of the iconoclasts, we clearly see the Devil's hatred for the Sacrifice of Christ offered on the altar and the Adoration of Him by the people offered at the altar-rails. What other explanation could there be for such gratuitous and irrational violence? - or, for that matter, for that with which the modernizing clergy opposes the return of the Old rite?

[12] or rather profaned (in the true sense of the word), because these compositions have been banished from the church onto tapes and discs so that they may be played to the accompaniment of any number of secular activities, when they are not performed in sterile public halls or in churches where the Blessed Sacrament is not infrequently left in the tabernacle and ignored -perhaps the clearest sign of their divorce from the cult of God for which they were created.

[13] although sometimes the Kyrie enjoys a three-fold repetition despite the new Mass text. Similarly the prayer Domine non sum dignus immediately preceding Holy Communion, recited three times first by the celebrant and later by the people, was reduced to a single recitation spoken by all at once.

[14] the author recalls how a bereaved mother was only able to come to terms with the death of her son after having participated in a Tridentine Requiem Mass sung for the repose of his soul.

[15] or Verwuestung as Cd. Ratzinger puts it in his preface to Mgr. Gamber's the Reform of the Roman Liturgy (op.cit.)

[16] which is how we reply to the pacifists mentioned in the Preface above. Similar remarks may be made, mutatis mutandis, of the Second Vatican Council.

[17] Cd. Ratzinger: My Life, p.174, German version.