

Assault on the Roman Rite

by John W. Mole

We propose that the word for what has been done to the Roman Rite since Vatican Council II is truncation.

Hardly had the Second Vatican Council come to an end in 1965 than the Roman Rite was set upon with fulgurating radicality by hordes of liturgical experts who, throwing off all restraint imposed by the Constitution on the Liturgy, rampaged like Red Guards in the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Aroused by articles 37-40 headed “Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Temperament and Traditions of People,” they made into a revolutionary slogan the opening phrase of article 40: “In some places and circumstances . . . an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed.” Indeed, their battle cry became “Ever more radical!” They claimed their extremely disruptive changes were clamored for by the people who, for the most part, were moving massively out of the Church. Multitudes of those who remained lost their belief in the reality of our Lord's Eucharistic presence.¹

Even within the radical group of articles 37-40, the Constitution shields the liturgy from revolutionary aggression. Article 38 calls for the substance of the Roman Rite to be safeguarded and article 39 demands respect for the fundamental norms laid down. Especially to be noted is that which stipulates: “new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing” (art. 23). Organic change assures the growth and development of the living thing which the Roman liturgy is. Alien to its life is change disruptive of its overall form or shape, of any particular form pertaining to its integrity (Latinity for example) and of its orientation, by which we mean its Christocentricity.

The so-called experts (more appropriately described as energumens) coalesced into a worldwide body of national liturgical commissions and groups such as the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). At its apex was the Consilium appointed in 1964 by Paul VI with over forty diocesan bishops to provide it with plausibility and two hundred experts from which to draw its workforce.

Exorbitant use of article 40

This largely autonomous establishment of liturgists became a law unto itself by usurping authority to interpret article 40 as universal in intent and extent despite the fact that it was meant to be restricted. The first exorbitant use of it was to justify vernacularizing the Mass totally and everywhere. Even pidgin English was pressed into service. Thus was contravened article 36 which stipulates that Latin must continue in use, albeit with more recourse to the vernacular than hitherto. Such serious tampering with the Constitution nullified its normative value. In consequence, the postconciliar reform movement was launched without norms to guide it.

The Consilium presented its new Order of the Mass (Novus Ordo) for the first time in the Sistine Chapel before bishops attending the Roman Synod in 1967, most of whom disapproved. Nonetheless, it was promulgated two years later, together with a General Instruction, so doctrinally deficient that it had to be withdrawn and corrected by the Congregation for Divine Doctrine. Further interventions of the said Congregation have been necessitated in the ensuing years, the latest being the rescinding of an approval for inclusive language granted by the Congregation for Divine Worship.

At Rome, throughout the postconciliar period, those responsible for Worship have been at variance with those responsible for Doctrine. All three Cardinal Prefects of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in office during this period (Ottaviani, Seper and Ratzinger) have strongly objected to the manner in which the liturgical reform of Vatican II has been implemented.²

Jungmann's masterful work, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, published only a decade before the Second Vatican Council, now reads like an obituary. Indeed a prominent Consilium expert, Joseph Gelineau, S.J., has had the honesty to declare: "Let it be candidly said: the Roman Rite which we have known hitherto no longer exists. It is destroyed."³ His conclusion is based on the liturgy being a symbolic action enacted with meaningful forms, to change any of which is to change the rite. In this respect, he reasons like the German scholar Msgr. Klaus Gamber who states: "Each rite constitutes a homogenous unity. So the

modification of some of its essential components means the destruction of the entire rite.”⁴ However, the whole outlook of Gelineau is diametrically opposed to that of Gamber. The former applauds and the latter deplors the destruction of the Roman Rite.

In regard to the present, blitzed condition of the Mass of all ages, it would take a genius comparable to that of Jungmann to give a comprehensive picture of what has befallen in the past thirty years. For the time being, we can only peer dimly at the murky scene of “devastation” (the *mot juste* of Cardinal Ratzinger).⁵

The liturgical experts make euphoric statements about what they think they have achieved. Bugnini, whom Paul VI made the chief artisan of the liturgical reform and secretary of the Consilium, said that the Roman Rite now “has a greater richness than all that has been seen in twenty centuries.”⁶

In 1969, the Consilium was abolished and replaced by a new Congregation for Divine Worship with Bugnini still in the saddle. In 1975, after an explosive meeting on June 19th of indignant cardinals, the new Congregation was abruptly terminated and this time Bugnini was dismissed in disgrace. The remainder of his turbulent career was spent, until his death in 1982, in the revolutionary turmoil of Iran where he had been sent as Vatican representative. His only liturgical achievement in exile was obtaining permission from the Ayatollah to celebrate Mass on Christmas Eve for Catholics among the fifty-two members of the American Embassy kept hostage for over a year.

From 1975 on, jurisdiction over the liturgy was back in the hands of the Congregation of Rites, originally appointed in 1585 to supervise the liturgical reform initiated by the Council of Trent. It had been set aside in 1964 so that Bugnini would not be hampered by the normal, circumspect, slow-moving pace of regular Vatican procedures. Now renamed the Congregation for Divine Worship, it returned to a situation so out of control of Pope and bishops and so dominated by the liturgical establishment that it had no alternative but to be subservient. In statements it prepares for the Holy Father to read, the praise due to the Constitution on the Liturgy is obsequiously extended to what the experts are doing with it.

The appalling state of the liturgy has yet to be seriously addressed by scholars in general. They have been strangely silent. The only voices we know to have been raised are those of Klaus Gamber (mentioned above) and Louis Bouyer (a Consilium appointee) who has said “There is practically no liturgy worthy of the name in the Church.” It obviously takes a lifetime to make a liturgical scholar. We whom concern has brought into the field late in life can only hope to acquire enough erudition to pose the questions which demand a response from the scholars and ultimately from the Holy See. Let us here take a tentative look at the vocabulary of the subject.

Vocabulary of the subject

The main term in the Latin text of the Constitution is *instauratio* with its connotation of St. Paul's *instaurare omnia in Christo* which in the past has been translated: “to restore all things in Christ.”⁷ The Fathers of Vatican II did not intend to start a revolution but to renew what had already been started by Solesmes in the 1850s, had received a further impetus from Pius X in 1903 and had been solidified theologically by Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* in 1947. This can be inferred from Paul VI's letter of promulgation of the new Roman Missal, dated April 3, 1969. St. Paul, in urging us to turn to the newness of life which arises in Christ and radiates from him, gives us a Christocentric orientation. A main “form” (in the sense that Gelineau uses this term) of the Roman Rite is its orientation towards Christ, signified by having the priest and people face (at least symbolically) towards the east. The term disorientation should therefore be applied to the practice of mutually eyeballing each other instead of all facing eastward towards the Lord. The assembly, as Cardinal Decourtray remarked sadly, is now focused on itself instead of on God.⁸

The term reform, which came to be habitually used soon after the Council, is extensive in its meaning. At best it means that one keeps aligned with the right direction like a navigator who continually corrects his course. The present movement of reform has been deprived of a direction or standard through the use of article 40 of the Constitution to nullify its other articles. A house divided against itself cannot stand. At the other end of the spectrum, reform means putting an end

to intolerable disorder. Let it be noted that disorder in the field of liturgy is a postconciliar, not a preconciliar, phenomenon.

Pope Pius X's Gregorian Reform, as it was called, was attaining full momentum just prior to the Second Vatican Council. Its form was the Latin language of the Mass raised to lyrical, indeed celestial, heights of expression. St. Pius X said he wanted the people to feel sure of the beauty of their prayer. His reform is aptly termed Gregorian because of its fidelity to the rule, attributed to Pope St. Gregory the Great (590-604), that the normative Mass be that which is expressed with the sacred chant which sprang from the exquisitely musical people which the Jews have always been, and which was adopted and developed by the early Christians. For the reformers of today, the normative Mass is that which is vernacularized.

The Gregorian and Pauline reforms differ greatly in their approach to the mystery of the Mass. The former seeks to penetrate it through the heart, aesthetically and transcendently. The effort of the latter to be reasonable and down to earth makes for banality rather than mystery. Young people generally, even those deprived of religious upbringing, on listening to Gregorian chant, perceive it as music "out of this world" (their term for transcendental.) The absence of this dimension from their lives makes them vulnerable to Satanic rock and roll as a substitute. The prevailing of the prosaic over the artistic form was accompanied by a wave of vandalism against sacred music. Gregorian choirs were disbanded, their directors dismissed and their music collections, painstakingly built up for generations, destroyed. The Pius X Institute at New York, whose winter courses and summer schools were attended by choir directors all over the continent disappeared from sight. Other forms of sacrality were swept away, such as that of the sanctuary (no longer distinct from the nave), of religious dress and of demeanor before the Eucharist in the Tabernacle.

What was done in the 16th century by Pope St. Pius V is referred to as the Tridentine Reform because of the fidelity with which the mandate given by the Council of Trent was implemented.

Given the discrepancy between what the Fathers of Vatican II intended and what has happened, the term Pauline reform should simply mean that what has been done since the Council is attributable to the personal responsibility of Pope Paul VI. He allowed the Consilium to act as an independent entity, uncontrolled by the Holy See as a whole. He tried to control it personally by having Bugnini report to him at the close of every day of the five years that the Consilium was at work. He reviewed each day's agenda brought to him by Bugnini word by word, line by line, for one, two or even three hours. Nothing indicates that Paul VI was endowed with genius in matters liturgical, as were Pope St. Gregory the Great, Pope St. Pius V and Pope St. Pius X. But given the “crash-program” mentality with which Bugnini operated, one can surmise that Paul VI's extraordinary efforts to keep personal control were a manifestation of anxiety rather than competence. His most notable interventions were to dismiss Cardinal Lercaro (president of the Consilium) and Bugnini when both fell from grace in 1969 and 1975 respectively. His famous lament about the smoke of Satan in the sanctuary was uttered in 1972.⁹

The Congregation for Worship has now chosen a new name for the game: inculturation. It explains the rationale for it in its Fourth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy, Articles 37-40.¹⁰ The principal players continue to be the liturgical experts (#30). Cardinal Ratzinger, in a discourse to Episcopal Conferences of Asia, meeting at Hong Kong, March 2-5, 1995, showed himself less than pleased with the term and concept of inculturation.¹¹

Proper use of article 40

The Fourth Instruction culminates in a lengthy protocol of precautionary measures for the proper use of article 40 of the Constitution. Thus the barn door is closed with a flourish thirty years after the horse has bolted. During this time article 22 (3) of the Constitution stipulating that “no person, not even a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority” has been a dead letter. The changes which the reformers have been flagrantly making by *fait accompli* have been acquiesced in by the Holy See. This habit has become so entrenched that it

could conceivably have culminated in women being ordained as priests openly. It is likely that this has already happened clandestinely. The declaration of the Congregation for Doctrine that the teaching of the Church is infallible in this matter no doubt indicates that nothing less than the Petrine power of the keys must be deployed against the power of the liturgical establishment.

The more the Pope celebrates Mass abroad on a scale practically beyond his control, the more he is vulnerable to the “ever more radical” frenzy of the reformers. It must surely pertain to the substance of the Roman Rite that bread and wine be placed on the altar, in order thereby to be made sacred and apt for the sacrifice of the Mass.

The Roman Canon refers to the offerings on the altar as *sancta sacrificia* even before they are consecrated. Yet at a papal mega-Mass celebrated in a stadium in February last year in Australia, 300 ciboria were not brought to the altar to be consecrated but put in the hands of 300 men and women dispersed in the crowd.¹²

Radical renewal of the liturgy is normally done from roots left in the soil, not wrenched from it. We began by noting that the extreme radicality of the postconciliar reformers was inaugurated by their arbitrary use of article 40 of the Constitution on the Liturgy for the purpose of totally vernacularizing the Mass. Let us also note that “to vernacularize” does not mean “to translate.” Here again Gelineau speaks with remarkable candor. He says categorically: “to translate is not to say the same thing with other words. It is to change the form.”¹³ Latin is a master language wherein the word *vernaculus* refers to a state of servility. And indeed, it has become amply evident that vernacularizing the liturgy makes it servile to ever changing fashions of speech. The ICEL is a self-perpetuating institution which itself has pointed out that the Mass needs to be retranslated every ten years. The vernacular Mass is enslaved to the banality of a committee.

The habit of acting independently, especially in regard to the Congregation for Doctrine, results in liturgical experts claiming that the inculturated practices they introduce are neutral as far as doctrine is concerned. The altar girl affair is a flagrant example. Even campaigners for the ordination of women contend that this is a matter of discipline, not doctrine. Cardinal Ratzinger, in taking exception to the

concept of inculturation at Hong Kong, pointed out that there is no such thing as faith without culture or culture without faith. Hence no cultural practice can be considered as doctrinally neutral. When Christian culture comes in contact with a pagan culture, the question is: can these two cultures merge? Does the pagan culture and the cultural practices associated with it have some affinity with the true faith? If not, there can be no meeting or commingling of the two cultures. Cardinal Ratzinger proposed that we should talk of interculturality, rather than of inculturation.

The doctrinal ground for opposing altar girls is that physical proximity of the server to the altar entails spiritual proximity to the vocation of priesthood. Only a boy should be put in this situation. If a girl is substituted, she is put in a situation of untruth. This should be avoided for the sake of the integrity of the girl as well as for that of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Doctrinal deviations

Vernacularizing the Mass in the 16th century was forbidden by the Council of Trent on doctrinal grounds. The removal of Latin enabled the Protestant reformers more easily to remove belief in the sacrificial nature of the Mass and in the Real Presence of our Lord in the Eucharist.

This stratagem has reappeared in the present postconciliar period to an alarming extent and the Congregation for Divine Worship is not exempt from responsibility. In 1974, a year before Bugnini was sent away in disgrace, it approved a vernacular Mass proposed by the Swiss bishops which was phrased in a Lutheran manner.¹⁴ The present Congregation, presumably on the demand of the Congregation for Doctrine, moved to remedy the situation but only in 1991 and somewhat inadequately.

English versions of the Mass are full of doctrinal aberrations because of infidelity to the Latin text. So-called inclusive language simply intensifies the problem because its ultimate goal is to impugn the Fatherhood of God.

In 1965, when Pope John Paul was still Bishop of Krakow, he discussed the phenomenon now referred to as inculturation with a friend, saying “Certainly we will preserve the basic elements, the bread, the wine, but all else will be changed according to local tradition: words, gestures, colors, vestments, chants, architecture, decor. The problem of liturgical reform is immense.”¹⁵ He was overly optimistic in thinking that the use of bread and wine would not be called into question. A French missionary bishop in Africa was obliged to resign in 1975 for using beer made from millet (an African cereal) for Mass instead of wine. An erudite book by another French missionary has recently appeared in which the thesis is elaborated that as bread and wine belong to European culture, they can be dispensed with. As millet is sacred to certain African peoples, both food made and beer brewed from it should be substituted at Mass.¹⁶ This kind of theorizing about inculturation, which also is found in Latin America, is referred to by Cardinal Ratzinger in his Hong Kong address as indigenism. There is evidently an aberrance or wildness intrinsic to the concept of inculturation which is irrepressible.

Truncation of the Roman Rite

We propose that the word for what has been done to the Roman Rite since the Second Vatican Council is truncation. The splendid tree that has grown throughout two millennia has had its branches cut off and its trunk cut down to a stump from which is supposed to spring a new inculturated Mass. The West is probably too deculturated for this to happen but it is possible in Africa, given that its peoples are still close enough to their tribal stage to have a religious culture that can be assimilated.

In the forlorn stump of the Roman Rite left by the Pauline reform, it can be supposed that there are basic elements of the liturgy of the first three centuries of Christianity before the differentiation into rites began. Perhaps from these rudiments an African rite might spring in time. In any event, trying to force the mutation of a new rite, African or otherwise, by revolutionary disruptive change of the Roman Rite can only bring about its end. In the vocabulary of the Pauline reform, it is called revision but in fact it is the death of the Roman Rite. In saying this, we do not mean that it has

actually been put to death. It has been saved providentially thanks to the Traditional Mass movement and John Paul II's motu proprio *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, July 2, 1988.¹⁷

- 1 According to two U.S. surveys, the number of disbelievers is 70%; another taken in France indicates 60% (of the 13% who still go to Mass.)
- 2 Cardinal Ottaviani's letter to Paul VI, dated Sept. 25, 1969, characterizes the *Novus Ordo Missae* as “a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was formulated in Session XXII of the Council of Trent.” Cardinal Ratzinger's aversion is evident in his book *Feast of Faith* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1986) and in his preface to *La Reforme liturgique en question*, by Klaus Gamber. Cardinal Seper made no public utterances but Bugnini, in his memoirs entitled *La Riforma liturgica* (Ed. Liturgiche, Roma, 1983), refers to Seper as being notoriously opposed to the liturgical reform (p. 477-478.)
- 3 Joseph Gelineau, S.J., *Demain la liturgie*, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 1979, p. 10.
- 4 Msgr. Klaus Gamber, *La Reforme liturgique en question*, Ed. Sainte-Madeleine, 1992, p. 6.
- 5 *Carrefours*, Oct. 22, 1969.
- 6 *The Decomposition of Catholicism*, L. Bouyer, London, 1970, p. 99.
- 7 Ephes. 1:10. The new critical edition of the Latin Vulgate renders the phrase as *recapitulare omnia in Christo* which the Jerusalem Bible translates: “bring everything together under Christ as head.”
- 8 *Eglise a Lyon* (Diocesan bulletin), May 5, 1992.
- 9 Discourse of June 30, 1972.
- 10 Issued March 29, 1994. Text in *Origins* (U.S. Bishops' documentary service), vol. 23, no. 23, April 24, 1994.
- 11 Text in *Origins*, vol. 24, no. 41, March 30, 1995.
- 12 *The Catholic Weekly*, Sydney, March 5, 1995.
- 13 Joseph Gelineau, *opus cit.*, pp. 9-10.

14 30 GIORNI, Rome, July, 1991, pp. 10-19.

15 Malinski, Mon ami, Karl Wojtyla, Paris, 1980, p. 220.

16 L'Eucharistie du mil, Rene Jaouen, Ed. Karthala, Paris, p. 286.

17 Cf. my article The Traditional Mass Movement