

# THE RIGHT TO BEAUTY

by Michael Davies

*Una Voce France* organized a colloquy, "The Right to Beauty", at the University of Strasbourg from 29-31 March. The following contribution by *Una Voce* President Michael Davies makes a radical, from the roots, examination of the nature of a right within the Catholic Church. If the traditional Mass is truly "the most beautiful thing this side of heaven" can it be said to be the birthright of every Catholic of the Latin Church, or in liturgical matters does only one right exist, that of the Pope to allow the faithful to worship in the manner which he sees fit to accord them? In other words, which should take precedence, *the will of the legislator or the good of those for whom he is legislating?*

The founders of the various Protestant denominations were revolutionaries rather than reformers. Their concern was not to reform the existing order but to introduce a new one. Monsignor Philip Hughes, in his classic study, *The Reformation in England*, notes that all revolutionaries are motivated by a common spirit:

The mania to ensure that all future history should date from their own reconstruction of primitive glory as they imagined this, characterized these revolutionaries, as it has characterized all the rest, the social and political rebels as truly as the religious .... They were determined to destroy all that lay between themselves and the restoration of primitive Christianity as they conceived this to have been.

The principal author of the Anglican liturgy was Thomas Cranmer, the apostate Archbishop of Canterbury. His first communion service contained in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, "The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, commonly called the Mass", was of an ambiguous nature. This ambiguity is stressed by Dr. Francis Clark in the most authoritative study of the Eucharistic doctrines of the Protestant Reformers yet undertaken:

The first Prayer book of Edward VI could not be convicted of overt heresy, for it was adroitly framed and contained no express denial of preReformation doctrine. It was, as an Anglican scholar puts it, "an ingenious essay in ambiguity", purposely worded in such a manner that the more conservative could place their construction upon it and reconcile their consciences to using

it, while the Reformers would interpret it in their own sense and would recognize it as an instrument for furthering the next stage of the religious revolution.

Dr. Clark also explains that:

In the earlier and critical period Cranmer and his friends saw that it was wisest to introduce the Reformation by stages, gradually preparing men's minds for more radical courses to come. At times compulsion or intimidation was necessary in order to quell opposition, but their general policy was first to neutralise the conservative mass of the people, to deprive them of their Catholic-minded leaders, and then accustom them by degrees to the new religious system.

There was little enthusiasm for the changes among the mass of the faithful, and sometimes fierce opposition. Commenting on the introduction of Cranmer's first (1549) Prayer Book, the Anglican Dean of Bristol, Douglas Harrison, admits:

It is not surprising that it met with a reception which was nowhere enthusiastic, and in the countryside there was violent opposition both in East Anglia and in Devon and Cornwall, where ten thousand "stout and valiant personages" marched on Exeter demanding their old services in Latin.

Dr. Adrian Fortescue, England's great historian of the Mass, notes that:

The Protestant Reformers naturally played havoc with the old liturgy. It was throughout the expression of the very ideas the Real Presence, Eucharistic Sacrifice and so on) they rejected. So they substituted for it new Communion services that expressed their principle but, of course, broke away utterly from all historic liturgical evolution.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of Father Fortescue's insistence that in composing new services the Protestant Reformers "broke away utterly from all historic liturgical evolution". Referring to the reform of Cranmer in 1549, in a defence of the Bull *Apostolicae Curae*, the Catholic Bishops of the Province of Westminster insisted that local churches are not entitled to devise new rites:

They must not omit or reform anything in those forms which immemorial tradition has bequeathed to us. For such an immemorial usage, whether or not it has in the course of ages incorporated superfluous accretions, must, in the estimation of those who believe in a divinely guarded, visible Church, at least

have retained whatever is necessary; so that in adhering rigidly to the rite handed down to us we can always feel secure: whereas, if we omit or change anything, we may perhaps be abandoning just that element which is essential . . . that they were permitted to subtract prayers and ceremonies in previous use, and even to remodel the existing rites in a most drastic manner, is a proposition for which we know of no historical foundation, and which appears to us absolutely incredible.

An accepted principle with regard to liturgical worship is that the doctrinal standpoint of a Christian body must necessarily be reflected in its worship. Liturgical rites should express what they contain. It is not necessary for the Catholic position to be expressly contradicted for a rite to become suspect; the suppression of prayers which had given liturgical expression to the doctrine behind the rite is more than sufficient to give cause for concern.

This principle is embodied in the phrase *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi* ("let the law of prayer fix the law of faith"), in other words the liturgy of the Church is a sure guide to her teaching. This is usually presented in the abbreviated form of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, and can be translated freely as meaning that the manner in which the Church worships (*lex orandi*) must reflect what the Church believes (*lex credendi*).

Monsignor Hughes insists that the 1549 Prayer Book made it clear that a new religion was being imposed:

This prayer book of 1549 was as clear a sign as a man might desire that a doctrinal revolution was intended and that it was, indeed, already in progress. Once these new sacramental rites, for example, had become the habit of the English people the substance of the doctrinal reformation, victorious now in northern Europe, would have transformed England also. All but insensibly, as the years went by, the beliefs enshrined in the old, and now disused rites, and kept alive by these rites in men's minds and affections; would disappear, *without the need of any systematic missionary effort to preach them down.*

In other words, when for decades the faithful were forced to worship as Protestants they became Protestants. Their faith had been destroyed by liturgical reform.

Bossuet writes:

We never disparage the faith of our fathers but hand it on exactly as we have received it. God willed that the truth should come down to us from pastor to

pastor, from hand to hand, without any evident novelties. It is in this way that we recognise what has always been believed and, accordingly, what must always be believed, It is, so to speak, from this word always that the truth and the promise derive their authority, an authority which would vanish completely the moment an interruption was discovered anywhere.

Professor James Hitchcock echoes Bossuet's sentiments in formulating the principle that:

Catholicism, although open to change, manifests a decided bias toward stability and toward the preservation of the past. This is because one of its principal tasks in the world is to witness to the reality of eternity; hence it cultivates what is timeless, enduring, and stable to serve as hints of eternity.

The response of Rome to the Protestant liturgical revolution is explained by Dr. Fortescue: "The Council of Trent (1545 1563), in opposition to the anarchy of these new services, wished the Roman Mass to be celebrated uniformly everywhere." In its eighteenth session the Council appointed a commission to examine the Missal, to revise it and to restore it "according to the custom and rite of the Holy Fathers", using for that purpose the best manuscripts and other documents. "They accomplished their task very well," comments Dr. Fortescue. "On 14th July, 1570, the Pope published the reformed Missal with the Bull *Quo Primum*. Its title was: *Missale Romanum ex decreto ss. Concilii Tridentini restitutum*." St. Pius is honoured by the Church as an instrument chosen by God *ad conterendos Ecclesiae hostes et ad divinum cultum reparandum*.

Up to the time of St. Pius V the history of the Roman rite had been one of natural and gradual development. It was regulated not by written legislation but by customary usage. Father David Knowles, Britain's most distinguished Catholic scholar until his death in 1974, explained that:

The Missal of 1570 was indeed the result of instructions given at Trent, but it was, in fact, as regards the Ordinary, Canon, Proper of the time and much else a replica of the Roman Missal of 1474, which in its turn repeated in all essentials the practice of the Roman Church of the epoch of Innocent III, which itself derived from the usage of Gregory the Great and his successors in the seventh century. In short, the Missal of 1570 was in essentials the usage

of the mainstream of medieval European Liturgy which included England and its rites.

There have been revisions since the reform of St. Pius V but, as Dr. Fortescue explains, up to his time (1917) these had been intended to keep the Missal in line with the reform of 1570. By the time of Clement VIII (1592-1605) printers had corrupted the text in several ways. "The work of the commission appointed by Clement VIII "was only to correct these corruptions. They did not in any way modify the Mass . . . Benedict XIV (1740-1758), who did so much for the reform of the liturgy did not revise the Missal." Dr. Fortescue deals with all the subsequent revisions up to his time in detail and concludes that:

Since the Council of Trent the history of the Mass is hardly anything but the composition and approval of new Masses. The scheme and all the fundamental parts remain the same. No one has thought of touching the venerable liturgy of the Roman Mass, except by adding to it new Propers.

The Reforms of Pius XII did go farther than this, notably in regard to the Holy Week services. But any objective assessment of his reforms will find that they were enacted "according to the custom and rite of the Holy Fathers", and with a profound respect for tradition. To quote Dr. Fortescue again:

Essentially the Missal of St. Pius V is the Gregorian Sacramentary; that again is formed from the Gelasian book which depends on the Leonine collection. We find the prayers of our Canon in the treatise *de Sacramentis* and allusions to it in the IVth century. So our Mass goes back, without essential change, to the age when it first developed out of the oldest liturgy of all. It is still redolent of that liturgy, of the days when Caesar ruled the world and thought he could stamp out the Faith of Christ, when our fathers met together before dawn and sang a hymn to Christ as to a God. The final result of our enquiry is that, in spite of unsolved problems, in spite of later changes, there is not in Christendom another rite so venerable as ours.

And again:

The Missal of Pius V is the one we still use. Later revisions are of slight importance. No doubt in every reform one may find something that one would have preferred not to change. Still, a just and reasonable criticism will admit that Pius V's restoration was on the whole eminently satisfactory. The

standard of the commission was antiquity. They abolished later ornate features and made for simplicity, yet without destroying all those picturesque elements that add poetic beauty to the severe Roman Mass. They expelled the host of long sequences that crowded Mass continually, but kept what are undoubtedly the five best; they reduced processions and elaborate ceremonials, yet kept the really pregnant ceremonies, candles, ashes, palms, and the beautiful Holy Week rites. Certainly we in the West must be very glad that we have the Roman rite in the form of Pius V's missal . . . There are many days still on which we say the Mass that has been said for centuries, back to the days of the Gelasian and Leonine books. And when they do come, the new Masses only affect the Proper. Our Canon is untouched, and all the scheme of the Mass. Our Missal is still that of Pius V. We may be very thankful that his Commission was so scrupulous to keep or restore the old Roman tradition.

The antiquity of the Roman Mass is a point which needs to be stressed. There is what Dr. Fortescue describes as a "prejudice that imagines that everything Eastern must be old." This is a mistake and there is no existing Eastern liturgy with a history of continual use stretching back as far as that of the Roman Mass.

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the importance of the Roman Missal from any standpoint. A. Baumstark, perhaps the greatest liturgical scholar of this century, expressed this well when he wrote that every worshipper taking part in this liturgy, "feels himself to be at the point which links those who before him, since the very earliest days of Christianity, have offered prayer and sacrifice with those who in time to come will be offering the same prayer and the same sacrifice, long after the last fragment of his mortal" remains have crumbled into dust."

It is natural that the Church, the steward of these holy mysteries, should clothe them with the most solemn and beautiful rites and ceremonies possible. It is equally natural that the book containing these rites should appropriate to itself some of the wonder and veneration evoked by the mysteries themselves. There can be no doubt that the leaders of the authentic liturgical movement in this century regarded the Missal of St. Pius V with much veneration. This veneration for the Missal is well expressed by Dom Cabrol:

The Missal being concerned directly with the Mass and the Holy Eucharist, which is the chief of the Sacraments, has the most right to our veneration, and with it the Pontifical and the Ritual, because those three in the early Church formed one volume as we have seen when speaking of the Sacramentary. The

Church herself seems to teach us by her actions the reverence in which the Missal should be held. At High Mass it is carried by the deacon in solemn procession to read from it the Gospel of the day. He incenses it as a sign of respect, and it is kissed by a priest as containing the very word of God Himself.

In the Middle Ages every kind of art was lavished upon it. It was adorned with delicate miniatures, with the most beautifully executed writing and lettering and bound between sheets of ivory, or even silver and gold and was studded with jewels like a precious reliquary.

The Missal has come into being gradually through the course of centuries always carefully guarded by the Church lest any error should slip into it. It is a summary of the authentic teaching of the Church, it reveals the true significance of the mystery which is accomplished in the Mass, and of the prayers which the Church uses.

Dom Cabrol also pays tribute to the incomparable beauty of the Missal from the literary and aesthetic point of view. He stresses that this is not a question of art for art's sake:

We know that truth cannot exist without beauty . . . The beauty of prayer consists in the true and sincere expression of deep sentiment. The Church has never disdained this beauty of form which follows as a consequence of truth; the great Cathedrals on which in past ages she lavished all the marvels of art stand witness to this.

The beauty, the worth, the perfection of the Roman liturgy of the Mass, so universally acknowledged and admired, was described by Fr. Faber as "the most beautiful thing this side of heaven." He continues:

It came forth out of the grand mind of the Church, and lifted us out of earth and out of self, and wrapped us round in a cloud of mystical sweetness and the sublimities of a more than angelic liturgy, and purified us almost without ourselves, and charmed us with celestial charming, so that our very senses seem to find vision, hearing fragrance, taste and touch beyond what earth can give.

Cardinal Gasquet rightly remarks that:

A Catholic who sees in the living liturgy of the Roman Church essential forms which remain what they were as much as 1,400 years ago cannot but feel a personal love for those sacred rites when they come to him with all the authority of centuries. Any rude handling of such forms must cause deep pain to those who know and use them. For they come to them from God, through Christ and through the Church. But they would not have such an attraction were they not also sanctified by the piety of so many generations who have prayed in the same words and found in them steadiness in joy and consolation in sorrow.

Liturgical laws, although coming within the category of ecclesiastical law, must be governed by the same principles by which any human law can be judged. The prayers in the Mass and the rubrics governing its celebration are generally the codification of practices already established by custom. "Liturgies are not made, they grow in the devotion of centuries," notes Professor Owen Chadwick in his history of the Reformation. Until the post-Vatican II liturgical revolution only heretics ever attempted any radical reform of the Liturgy, and it cannot be denied that the reform of Pope Paul VI "broke away utterly from all historic liturgical evolution". Msgr. Klaus Gamber insists in his book on the post-conciliar reform, which has been endorsed by three cardinals, that:

Much more radical than any liturgical changes introduced by Luther, at least as far as the rite was concerned, was the reorganization of our own liturgy - above all, the fundamental changes that were made in the liturgy of the Mass. It also demonstrated much less understanding for the emotional ties the faithful had to the traditional rite.

And again:

The liturgical reform, welcomed with so much idealism and hope by so many priests and lay people alike has turned out to be a liturgical destruction of startling proportions - a *débâcle* worsening with each passing year. Instead of the hoped-for renewal of the Church and of Catholic life, we are now witnessing a dismantling of the traditional values and piety on which our faith rests. Instead of the fruitful renewal of the liturgy, what we see is a destruction of the forms of the Mass which had developed organically during the course of many centuries.



This brings us at last to the question of the right to beauty. Do we have a true right to the traditional Mass, to "the most beautiful thing this side of heaven"? If the traditional Mass the birthright of every Catholic of the Roman rite or do we have a right only to what the Pope feels inclined to grant us, to the reform which Msgr. Gamber states "did not provide the people with bread, but with stones".

During this century, as a reaction to Modernism, there has evolved among many of the most loyal, the most orthodox Catholics, a totally untraditional and uncatholic concept of the papacy in which, to all intents and purposes, the Pope is envisaged as a dictator whose merest whim is law, and whose subjects do can have a genuine right only to what he sees fit to accord them.

On the contrary, where there is a question of rights, it is the rights of the subject rather than those of the legislator that must take precedence. St. Thomas accepts the classical definition of justice as rendering to each one what is his right or due, and explains that a man is said to be just because he respects the right of others. Every legislator in Church and State has an absolute obligation to rule justly, and this obligation is not simply binding upon the Pope, but it is clear that in his capacity as the Vicar, the earthly representative of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all justice, this obligation binds the Pope more than any other ruler. He is the supreme shepherd charged with guiding his flock to heaven, and if, through harsh or unjust treatment on his part, even one of them should be driven from the fold he would bear a heavy responsibility. He has the duty to emulate his divine master and guide his flock to green pastures and clear refreshing waters (Psalm 22). What appears to be the virtually unlimited juridical authority possessed by the Pope is restricted by moral considerations. What is legally valid is not necessarily morally licit. An evident example of legally valid but morally illicit papal legislation was the all too frequent practice of nepotism in which benefices established for the salvation of souls were used by popes as no more than a source of income for their relations. Karl Rahner, who was most certainly not a traditional Catholic, wrote an interesting study in 1965 on the distinction between legally valid but morally illicit papal legislation, and used the liturgy to illustrate his thesis. The Pope, he explained, is legally entitled to impose the Roman rite upon the eastern rites, but to do so would be a totally immoral act which would inevitably result in a schism for which the Pope would be responsible.

In his book *L'Eglise du Verbe Incarné*, Cardinal Journet quotes Cajetan as follows:

All this power is given to the Pope for no other end than the service of the Church. She is greater than he, not in authority but in worth and nobility. The

papacy is for the Church, not the Church for the papacy: the end is always a nobler thing than the means. Hence the Pope calls himself the "Servant of the servants of God" and, so doing, he stands in the truth, *et sic est in veritate*.

An examination of any form of human law, common law, liturgical law, laws relating to games, or the laws of grammar, makes it clear that they have no intrinsic value in themselves but are simply a means to an end, and that end is the common good of those for whom the laws are ordained. There is no intrinsic merit in driving on the left side of the road or on the right, but it is clearly in the common interest of all motorists that in any particular country they should all drive on the same side. St. Thomas defines a law as "An ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated."

The consensus of Catholic authorities agrees with St. Thomas in his exposition of the nature of human law, namely, that whether civil or ecclesiastical it is an act of public authority having the right to demand obedience, but which itself must conform to the demands of reason and be seen to have an effect that is *both good and to the benefit to those for whom it is intended*. St. Thomas, followed by other authorities, warns that any change in existing legislation must be made only with extreme caution, particularly where it might involve changes in any longstanding customs. In support of this contention he cites the Decretals: "It is absurd, and a detestable shame, that we should suffer those traditions to be changed which we have received from the fathers of old." He adds that the very fact of changing a law, even for a better one, "is of itself prejudicial to the common good: because custom avails much for the observance of laws, seeing that what is done contrary to general custom even in slight matters is looked upon as grave." Professor Hitchcock states that:

The rejection of traditional ritual places the individual outside his community and is hence an alienating experience; it tends not toward an increase of happiness or meaning but the reverse.

In discussing the question of the mutation of laws, St. Thomas lays down the premise that there are two remote reasons which can lead to a just change in the laws. The first resides in the nature of man who, being a rational being, is gradually led by his reason from what is less perfect to what is more perfect. The second reason must be found in the actions which are being subjected to the regulation of law, and which can change according to the various circumstances in which men find themselves and in which they must work. Every change in law must be determined by an *evident necessity* of the common good since law is rightly changed only insofar as this change

manifestly contributes to the welfare of the community. The principle was echoed in the Liturgy Constitution of the Second Vatican Council which commanded that "there must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them" (Article 23).

"It is well known," writes Louis Salleron, "that a tried and tested revolutionary technique for overthrowing established societies is the call for a return to its origins. It is no longer a question of pruning the tree so that it will bear better fruit; it must be sawn down at its very base under the pretext of reinvigorating the roots." Pascal notes that custom is the whole of equity for the sole reason that it is accepted and that anyone who tries to trace it back to its first principles will destroy it:

The art of opposition and rebellion lies in undermining established customs by tracing them back to their origins in order to reveal their lack of authority and justice. "We must," it is said, "go back to the primitive and fundamental laws of the state which have been abolished by unjust custom." It is the surest way of losing everything; nothing will appear just when subjected to a test of that kind.

Even where a change in the law carries an evident benefit it will be accompanied by some harm to the common good as any change in the law abandons a custom, and custom is always a great help and support in the observance of laws.

Any change in an individual law diminishes the force and respect paid to Law because a custom is taken away. Reference has already been made to the importance attached by St. Thomas Aquinas to maintaining existing customs unless changing them is demanded by some overwhelming necessity. With profound psychological insight he adds that this is true even when the innovations contrary to custom are minor ones, for, even though minor in themselves, they may appear important in the common estimation. From this he draws a general conclusion: law must never be changed unless it is certain that the common good will find in the modification at least adequate compensation for the harm done by way of derogating a custom. A principle enunciated by Professor Hitchcock is that: "The decline of a sense of tradition in the Church severely weakens not only its continuity with the ages past but also its coherence in the present age."

Professor Johannes Wagner, Director of the Liturgical Institute of Trier, reached the same conclusion when he stated:

History has proved a thousand times that there is nothing more dangerous for a religion, nothing is more likely to result in discontent, incertitude, division,

and apostasy than interference with the liturgy and consequently with religious sensibility.

Suarez, another great authority, insists that for his law to be considered reasonable, a legislator must not simply refrain from demanding something his subjects will find impossible to carry out, but that the law must not even be too difficult, distressing or disagreeable, taking account of human frailty. On no account should it contradict any reasonable custom because custom is a kind of "second nature" and what it finds abhorrent "is considered to be morally impossible." He also lays great stress on the necessity for laws to be permanent, not in the sense that they can never be abrogated, but that this shall only occur if changing circumstances make it quite clear that they are no longer just. If legislation is to work in the common interest it must aim at stability and uniformity within the community.

Where there is the least doubt that the benefits of a change in the laws are likely to outweigh considerably the harm that will result from a change of custom then it is better to conserve the existing legislation rather than change it. Being the accepted practice, it has, so to speak, the right of possession and, in a case of doubt, it is the right of possession which is the stronger. Another principle stated by Professor Hitchcock is that:

The manipulation of sacred symbols to give increased meaning to the liturgy tends instead to destroy its meaning and alienate the participants from the Church's worship.

In his Apostolic Constitution *Auctorem Fidei* (28 August, 1794) Pope Pius VI condemned the pseudo Synod of Pistoia for its desire to return to what it claimed were more primitive sources by simplifying the rites, using the vernacular, and saying the entire Mass in an audible tone. The Pope laid particular stress on the fact that this Synod had suggested a conflict between the principles which should govern the celebration of the Liturgy and the order *currently in use*, accepted and approved by the Church. The proposed changes were condemned as "false, disturbing the prescribed order of the celebration of the mysteries, and easily productive of many evils."

The history of the various Christian denominations is replete with instances of disruption and even schisms concerning changes in established customs, changes which many modern commentators might regard as trivial matters. The secession of the Old Believers from the Russian Orthodox Church is a typical example. What such

incidents prove is the accuracy of St. Thomas's insight into the harmful effects of changing the *status quo* without overwhelming reasons for doing so.

"Sacred rituals, " notes Professor Hitchcock,"cannot be reformed substantially without serious dislocation in the society whose symbols they are." He expresses well the total incompatibility of any radical reform of the Catholic liturgy with the ethos and traditions of the Church:

The radical and deliberate alteration of ritual leads inevitably to the radical alteration of belief as well. This radical alteration causes an immediate loss of contact with the living past of the community, which comes instead to be a deadening burden. The desire to shed the burden of the past is incompatible with Catholicism, which accepts history as an organic development from ancient roots and expresses this acceptance in a deep respect for Tradition.

What Professor Hitchcock describes here is precisely what Mgr. Gamber considers to be the result of the reform of Pope Paul VI:

Instead of the hoped-for renewal of the Church and of Catholic life, we are now witnessing a dismantling of the traditional values and piety on which our faith rests. Instead of the fruitful renewal of the liturgy, what we see is a destruction of the forms of the Mass which had developed organically during the course of many centuries.

*Salus animarum suprema est lex* - "The good of souls is the supreme law". It is a law which binds all Christians and binds above all the Holy Father who, we can be sure, wishes to be bound by it. Did he not decree in his Apostolic Constitution *Ecclesia Dei* that by virtue of his apostolic authority "respect must everywhere be shown for the feelings of all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition"? We have a right to what is essential for the good of our souls. We have a right to beauty, and therefore a right to the traditional Mass of the Roman rite, "the most beautiful thing this side of heaven."

Some of the sources referred to in the notes have been abbreviated as follows:

ESR F. Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Devon, 1980).

RIE P. Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, 3 volumes (London, 1950).

RRL K. Gamber, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy* (New York, 1993).

RS J. Hitchcock, *The Recovery of the Sacred* (New York, 1974).

ST *Summa Theologica*.

TM A. Fortescue, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (London, 1917).