

In this simply stated but immensely appealing article, Father Thwaites states why the Old Mass has become increasingly appealing to him, whilst at the same time the dangers of the New are now increasingly apparent.

### **Thoughts on the New Rite of Mass**

By Hugh Thwaites, S.J.

From Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi website

The dangers in the new rite are not immediately apparent. They are not apparent because Catholics, brought up in the faith, do not know of the attraction Protestantism has for our fallen human nature, how lethal it is, and do not recognise its symptoms.

During World War II, we were given lectures on poison gas. I remember we were told that phosgene smelled like a field of rotting cabbages. If I'd been caught in such a gas attack, I'd not have thought, "Ah! Rotting cabbages! It must be a phosgene gas attack." I'd only have realised what it was and started putting on my gasmask when my throat started burning. On the other hand, if ever I'd once been caught in such an attack, for the rest of my life I'm sure that at the very first whiff of phosgene I'd have realised, "This is lethal."

Having therefore been reared as an Anglican, perhaps I know more of its attractions and of its dangers and can better recognise its symptoms than can those who have always been Catholics.

It seems to me that Protestantism comes easier to fallen human nature than does the true faith. It can seem more attractive. It lets us live lower down the mountain of God. It makes fewer demands on us. It does not call for that total submission of intellect and will that God requires of His rational creatures. It does not call for the "obedience of faith" that St. Paul speaks of.

Someone who had never before smelled phosgene might at first think it a pleasantly sweet smell. Catholics with only a book knowledge of Protestantism might well think, at first encounter and not recognising it as such, "This is very attractive. Why was it all made to look so difficult before?" Having been reared an Anglican, I recognise it and want to keep away.

We all know that there were six Protestant observers who had a hand in the framing of the new rite of Mass. Their finger prints on the finished result are plainly visible to me, though seemingly invisible to many.

One of the main dangers of the new rite is that it presents no built-in bulwark against a gradual slide into a Protestantised liturgy, and thence into Protestantism.

One obvious difference between Catholic and Protestant liturgy is that the Catholic liturgy is sacramental. Christ operates directly, immediately, in each of the sacraments, and in the sacramental sacrifice of the Mass He is always the principal Celebrant.

Protestant liturgy is non-sacramental, *ex opere operantis* not *ex opere operato*. When I was an Anglican our liturgy was very reverent, very devout and correct, and was carried out with great decorum. But it all depended on us. There was no sense of anything objectively happening on the altar table - for the very good reason, of course, that nothing did happen on the altar table.

For Catholics, the whole attraction of the Mass is what happens on the altar: the fact that Jesus Christ, at the bidding of one of His priests, takes the place of the bread and wine, and asks us to offer ourselves together with Him to the Father in one, perfect Sacrifice. As St. Robert Bellarmine put it, the Mass is the sacrifice in which the entire Church, in union with her Divine Head, offers herself to the Father.

Protestant liturgy, in the absence of the Divine Sacrifice, offers God the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of a humble and contrite heart, the offering of devout hymns. This is good in itself, but it is no substitute for the Sacrifice that God has asked us to offer in memory of Him.

The new rite allows the celebrant to move the style of the liturgy in a Protestant direction. I was in Sydney a few years ago during Holy Week. To begin with, I went to the church of the parish where I was staying. The liturgy there was so charismatic

and I asked where I could find something more Catholic, and I was directed to a parish which had a reputation for its good liturgy. So I went there. The liturgy was indeed carried out with great reverence. The choir, mostly women, was in splendid choir dress, and the English chant, of both priest and people, was as good as anything I've heard in a Catholic church. But I couldn't help thinking, "If they did this a little better, it would be nearly as good as what happens every Sunday in Worcester Cathedral".

That is, the more correctly our new liturgy is carried out, the more it can outwardly resemble Protestant liturgy.

Recently too I was in Trinidad, not having been there for over 30 years. In the 1960's the liturgy was carried out very much like anywhere else. But now in 1993 the liturgy did not seem to be Catholic at all; it seemed to be the liturgy of another religion.

As I sat in my president's chair, and heard the enthusiastic singing, the handclapping, the guitars and the tambourines, as I saw men walk right in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle without so much as a nod, as I heard the Precious Blood referred to as "wine", I remembered Dom Gueranger's dictum, "To change people's religion, you need do no more than change their books of worship". And I wondered, "Where will it all end?"

As an Anglican, we were not high church. But we certainly were not low church. The liturgy in that Trinidad church seemed very low church indeed.

When people forget about Original Sin, they are unaware of the chronic weakness of our intellect and wills, and of our chronic tendency to slide into error and sin. Our faith needs a frequent input of doctrinally nourishing liturgy if it is to stay pure. The traditional rite of Mass provided this. The new rite does not.

There is nothing wrong with the new rite. Rome cannot feed her children with poison. But the new rite of Mass does not give us what we need. Michael Davies' analogy is helpful here. If a doctor tells a couple that their child need milk every day, and they give the child only water, the child may not live. There is nothing wrong with water. But if the child needs milk, water may not be enough.

There is no heresy in the new rite. Rome cannot authorise heresy. But the new rite, it would seem, does not give us enough Catholic doctrine to prevent Catholics from unwittingly becoming Protestant in their thinking. As Fulton Sheen put it, "If you don't behave as you believe, you will end by believing as you behave." The new rite of Mass is capable of being carried out in a Protestant manner. Given the chronic tendency of our fallen human nature to go for what is easier, our liturgy, in the hands of the ill-instructed, will always tend to a Protestant interpretation. And Catholic liturgy carried out in a Protestant manner will lead the worshippers to Protestantism.

"Where will it all end?" So far as I am concerned, it has ended by my being resolved to offer Mass, as much as possible, in the traditional rite of the Church. This rite exactly expresses my eucharistic faith. The new rite does not. Neither does it nourish my faith. The traditional rite of Mass has nourished the faith of countless Catholics in the years past. Please God it will do the same for me, and for many others, in the years to come.

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After the New Order of Mass was introduced in 1970, the late Cardinal Heenan obtained in November 1971 a Papal Indult, under which any bishop in England and Wales could permit celebrations of the Old Mass for the benefit of a group of the faithful.

In October 1984, Pope John Paul II granted an Indult to every bishop in the world allowing the celebration of Mass according to the Roman Missal of 1962.

In July 1988 Pope John Paul II said to the bishops of the world:

"It is necessary that all the pastors and other faithful have a new awareness, not only of the lawfulness but also of the richness for the Church, of diversity of charisms, traditions of spirituality and apostolate (Ecclesia Dei moto proprio 5,a) . .

"To all those Catholic faithful who feel attached to some previous liturgical forms of the Latin tradition I wish to manifest my will to facilitate their ecclesial communion by means of the necessary measures to guarantee respect for their rightful aspirations. In this matter I ask for the support of the bishops and of those engaged in the pastoral ministry in the Church (E.D. 6,c) . . .

". . . moreover, respect must everywhere be shown for all those who are attached to the Latin liturgical tradition, but a wide and generous application of the directives already issued . . ." (E.D. 6,c).

Shortly after, the Holy Father appointed a Commission of nine Cardinals to examine the legal status of the traditional rite of the Mass commonly known as the Tridentine Mass. Subsequently, the Commission stated that bishops cannot forbid or place restrictions on the celebration of the traditional rite of Mass, whether in public or private, and that the Holy See does recognise the right of the priest to celebrate the traditional Mass.

**- Christian Order, May 1993, pages 260-263, used with kind permission.**