



THE ROMAN RITE old and new

Don Pietro Leone Monselice

RORATE CÆLI

The Roman Rite: Old and New - I

Introduction

O GOD, WHY HAST THOU CAST US OFF UNTO THE END? Why is thy wrath enkindled against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed from the beginning: the sceptre of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed: Mount Sion in which thou hast dwelt. Lift up thy hands against their pride unto the end: see what things the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary. And they that hate thee have made their boasts, in the midst of thy solemnity. They have set up their ensigns for signs: and they knew not both in the going out and in the highest top. As with axes in a wood of trees, they have cut down at once the gates thereof: with axe and hatchet they have brought it down. They have set fire to thy sanctuary: they have defiled the dwelling place of thy name on the earth. They said in their heart, the whole kindred of them together: Let us abolish all the festival days of God from the land.

Ps.73, 1-8.

Preface

The liberalization of the Old Roman Rite by the Supreme Pontiff in September 2007 has stimulated a variety of reactions. Polemicists on the side of modernity have labelled it as “something for nostalgics”[1] or as incomprehensible and therefore to be rejected[2]; while polemicists on the side of Tradition have labelled the New Rite (as they always had) as invalid[3] or sacrilegious.

Pacifists, by contrast, have either attributed the preference for one rite or the other to “sensibility” alone[4], or have ascribed an equal value to both rites[5], speaking for example of “respective strengths”, such as a greater “verticality” in the Old Rite and a wider range of readings in the New[6]. If such persons have any reservations concerning the New Rite, they claim that it suffices to celebrate it well and reverently.

To this background, the present essay aims to evaluate the two rites scientifically: more precisely to compare them in regard to their theology of the Mass. In so doing, it seeks neither to make peace nor war, but simply to establish the truth, by examining the relevant facts and drawing the necessary conclusions.

The essay consists in large part of a synthesis, a re-ordering, and in the second part a certain development, of the relevant material taken from the book “Pope Paul’s New Mass” by Michael Davies[7]. It relies greatly on the Critical Study of the Novus Ordo Missae by Cardinals Ottaviani and Bacci and on the later studies made by Una Voce and by Lorenzo Bianchi (op.cit.) on the changes to the propers.

It aims to give the reader a synthetic overview of the subject, both in regard to the ordinary, (or “common”) of the Mass, that is to say those parts which are common to all Masses, and in regard to the propers, that is to say those parts which are proper to any given Mass. The first half of the

essay analyzes the common of the Mass, the second half analyzes inter alia the propers of the Mass.

Historical Introduction

The Old Roman Rite is the most ancient rite of the Catholic Church, as Mgr. Klaus Gamber writes in his preface to the “Reform of the Roman Liturgy”: “At all events it represents the oldest rite”[8].

In the first three centuries after the death of Christ, the Mass fell into two main parts: the first was a Liturgy of the Word with prayers, reading, and sermon; the second was the Eucharist, celebrated by the bishop according to fixed formulae. As yet, no liturgical books were used at the Mass apart from the Bible from which the lessons were read. The Mass, as it subsisted at this period, is described in the celebrated Apologia of St. Justin Martyr (died c.164 A.D.), where all the essential elements of the Old Roman Rite can already be discerned.

Once the practice of writing down the liturgy had been established in the fourth century, the pattern evident in the Mass up to this date became crystallized into four parent rites from which all others descend. Three of these four rites issue from the three ancient patriarchates of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch; the fourth, the Gallican rite (which may in its turn issue from the Antiochan rite), formed the basis of the liturgies of north Italy, Gaul, Germany, Spain, Britain, and Ireland.

By the 5th century, the parts of the liturgy said by the priest at the altar began to be collected into books called Sacramentaries. Towards the end of the 8th century, Charlemagne obtained a copy of a Sacramentary, named the Gregorian Sacramentary, from Pope Adrian I, in order to obtain a more uniform liturgy within his empire. He entrusted it to Alcuin of York for its completion. The Sacramentary was Roman, and, as such, sober and dignified. It was completed from Gallican sources, which lent it a more exuberant, emotional tone. The resulting book became the first official missal for Europe.

In the early 13th century the Franciscans adopted this missal “according to the rite of the Roman Curia” for their order. In the later 13th century, Pope Nicholas III imposed a modified form of it on the diocese of Rome, which is, “in all important respects, the form found in the missal of Saint Pius V” (Chapter 1, Michael Davies).

In the course of the middle ages, various divergences had arisen in liturgical usages and customs in lands such as France, Germany, and Africa, which showed a need for a uniform Roman rite, a need all the more pressing in the wake of the Protestant eucharistic heresies. For these reasons, a reform of the Roman rite was decreed by the Council of Trent, and promulgated seven years after its conclusion (in 1570) with the Bull Quo Primum of St. Pius V. This rite, which was imposed on the whole Church of the Roman discipline is not viewed by the Pope as a New Rite but as a consolidation and codification (“statuimus et ordinamus”), and as a return to the ancient norm and rite of the Holy Fathers (“ad pristinam sanctorum patrum normam et ritum”).

This brief historical sketch may serve to show that there were not a series of rites that culminated in the rite of Saint Pius V, or, much less, that the rite of Saint Pius V was the product of the Council of Trent's thinking (as the New Rite is arguably a product of the Second Vatican Council's thinking)[9]. Rather, it is the definitive form of the Roman rite of Mass, which has known a certain development, particularly in the first half of its existence, and a certain variation in the second half of its existence.

From the promulgation of the Roman missal in 1570, the Old Roman Rite remained substantially unchanged for almost four centuries until the reform of the Holy Week in 1955-6[10]. This was carried out by a Commission including the men who were later to become Paul VI, Cd. Bea[11], and Mgr. Bugnini, together with Fr. Carlo Braga (of whom we shall have occasion to speak later).

Fr. Carusi comments: "Beginning with Palm Sunday, a ritual of versus populum is created, so that the back is turned towards the altar and the cross. On Maundy Thursday, the laity are made to enter the sanctuary. On Good Friday, the honours rendered to the Most Blessed Sacrament are reduced as is the veneration of the Cross". On Holy Saturday, (which Fr. Braga described as "the head of the battering-ram which pierced the fortress of our hitherto static liturgy"), "the symbolism relating to Original Sin and Baptism at the door-way into the Church is demolished ... and the Gospel passages on the institution of the Holy Eucharist are edited out". On Palm Sunday, and on Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, which previously was always linked to the account of the Passion on these days, thus showing, inter alia, the sacrificial nature of the Mass, was similarly edited out[12].

Subsequent to these changes, the next innovation made to the text of the Mass was the introduction of St. Joseph into the Canon by Bl. John XXIII, which disturbed the symmetry of the Canon and constituted the first change in it since the time of St. Gregory the Great.

But from the prescriptions of the Second Vatican Council documents *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in 1963 to that of *Missale Romanum* in 1969, a series of changes were made to the Roman rite which were so wide-ranging and profound as in effect to destroy that rite entirely and to substitute it with another.

Later, we shall consider the character of this New Rite; for the moment, let us quote certain liturgical experts as to the destruction of the Old. Fr. Joseph G lineau S.J., a Council peritus and liberal apologist for the new liturgy, states in his book "Demain la Liturgie" (1976 MD p.77-8): "To tell the truth, it is a different liturgy of the Mass. This needs to be said without ambiguity. The Roman rite as we knew it no longer exists. It has been destroyed... [the former edifice]... appears to-day either as a ruin, or the partial substructure of a different building." [13]

In a similar vein, Cd. Ratzinger, in his autobiography "My Life" writes: "The old building was taken down and another was built, largely from the material of the previous building of course and also using the old design... but it was a new building." [14]

As he had stated in his introduction to Mgr. Gamber's "Reform of the Roman liturgy": "This is not a development of living liturgy, but substitutes this with a fabrication following the pattern of technical production: the ready-made product of the moment." [15] Mgr. Gamber writes (op. cit.): "instead of a fruitful renovation of the liturgy, the destruction of liturgical forms that had grown up organically over a period of many centuries." [16]

Notes:

[1] as though all that can be said for it is that it is a thing of the past. This position is untenable because many of the supporters of the old rite are young. Nostalgia means the desire to return and it is impossible to return to a place where one has never been.

[2] cf. the subsection on Latin below [future post]

[3] cf. section D [future post].

[4] in a subjectivist move. And besides, how can one claim that appreciation of the Old rite is a matter of taste when this rite is so intimately and perfectly adapted to objective reality of the supernatural order as to share in the very Truth, Good, and Beauty that this reality comprises? To draw a comparison from the natural order, this would be like claiming that it were a matter of taste to appreciate the blue of the sky and not to prefer, for example, that it be green.

[5] they view contemporary liturgical abuses as unconnected with the New Rite (see the beginning of the epilogue to this essay and the conclusion to section A of part II for a reply). Such are the pacifists in the field of the liturgy; in the field of doctrine they view the Second Vatican Council in continuity with Tradition and consider subsequent doctrinal abuses as unconnected with it.

[6] cf. the subsection on the Gospel and Epistles [future post]

[7] Vol III of Liturgical Revolution, Angelus Press 1980.

[8] "Sie stellt auf jeden Fall den aeltesten Ritus dar". We refer to the essay 'Le Origini Apostolico-Patristiche della Messa cosiddetta ,Tridentina' (in course of publication) which trace its origins to Our Lord Himself. The essay quotes M. Righetti *Manuale di Storia Liturgica I*, Milano 1964, p.40 in this regard; the tradition manifest in the *Testamentum Domini* and St. Justin Martyr that He issued liturgical norms on the very day of the Resurrection; and the witness of St. Leo (Sermo 72, 2) and of Sixtus V (in the Bull *Immensa*) that He did so between the Resurrection and the Ascension. In particular it quotes the first letter of Pope St. Clement to the Corinthians (ch. XL) enumerating the liturgical dispositions of Our Lord. What indeed would have been more important to establish for the Church than the Holy and perpetual Sacrifice?

[9] as Mgr. Bugnini opines (at III 25.1 p.390 of his book *la Riforma liturgica*, op. cit): "Ambedue sono scaturiti dalla volontà riformatrice e dai principi stabiliti da un concilio : Both derived from the will to reform and from principles established by a council"

[10] cf. The Reform of the Holy Week in the Years 1951-1956 by Fr. Stefano Carusi on Rorate Caeli.

[11] known for his new version of the psalms which had been untouched since their translation by St. Jerome in the 4th century.

[12] of course in the New Rite the Passion is no longer read on this Tuesday or Wednesday.

[13] c'est une autre liturgie de la messe.....le rite romain tel que nous l'avons connu n'existe plus....Il est détruit.

[14] "Man brach das alte Gebaeude ab und baute ein anderes, freilich weitgehend aus dem Material des Bisherigen und auch unter Verwendung der alten Bauplaene...ein Neubau".

[15] "... nach dem Muster technischer Produktion das Machen, das platte Produkt des Augenblicks."

[16] "anstatt einer fruchtbaren Erneuerung der Liturgie, eine Zerstoerung der in vielen Jahrhunderten organisch gewachsenen Formen des Gottesdienstes". In virtue of such considerations we speak in this essay of two distinct rites, and not of two distinct forms of a rite. In this we follow Mgr. Gamber who entitles two of his liturgical works: Ritus romanus und Ritus modernus and Neuer und alter Meszritus.