



# THE ROMAN RITE old and new

Don Pietro Leone Monselice

RORATE CÆLI

## **The Roman Rite: Old and New - V**

### **The theology of the New Mass: Latin, Orientation, Altar as Table, Participation**

In the fifth part of Don Pietro Leone's "The Roman Rite: Old and New", the author continues his thorough presentation of the several problematic aspects of the theology of the New Mass, as compared with the Traditional Rite, now dealing with the language, the grave novelty of liturgical disorientation, the abomination of the sacrificial Altar seen primarily as a supper table, and the distortion of the meaning of active participation.

#### **6. Latin**

The Latin language in its sacred, immutable, traditional, and universal character is perfectly adapted to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to the doctrine it expresses, as to the Catholic Church, and more generally to catholicity itself[1].

In being immutable, traditional, and universal, it constitutes a principle of unity for all Catholics of the Roman rite, not only of all nations but also of all times: a principle both of visible unity and of unity in the Faith.

Latin was abolished by Martin Luther for the same rationale expressed as follows in the 24th of the "Thirty-Nine Articles", in direct defiance of the immemorial practice of the Church, that would be confirmed by canon 9 of Session 22 of the Council of Trent[2]: "It is a thing plainly repugnant to the word of God and the custom of the primitive Church to have public prayer in the Church or to minister the Sacraments in a tongue not understood of the people." [3] Dom Guéranger states that "we must admit that it is a master-stroke of Protestantism to have declared war on this sacred language" (MD p. 357).

It is clear, moreover, that what is lost in the Mass alongside the Latin language is a sense not only of the sacred, but also of immutability, of Tradition, and of universality.

In addition, with its translation into innumerable languages the Mass loses its catechetical uniformity and clarity[4]; and once it is no longer the vehicle for Latin chant, created by the greatest composers that the world has ever known, it loses its power profoundly to touch the human heart on the contemplation of the mysteries of salvation[5].

In a word, with the loss of Latin the Mass loses a great part of its very catholicity.

The document *Tres Abhinc Annos* ("The Second Instruction" in 1967) granted permission for the whole Mass, including the Canon, to be said aloud and in the vernacular. This was contrary to the intention of the members of the Second Vatican Council as is shown by Article 36 of the Liturgical Constitution, which neither intended nor envisaged a vernacular canon, and as late as 1965 insisted that permission would never be given for this; which permitted the vernacular: i) only as a concession; ii) only in certain parts of the Mass; iii) and not in parts pertaining to the priest alone (MD p. 368).

The abolition of Latin was the work of the “liturgical experts”. Michael Davies comments (p. 368): “Cardinal Heenan testified that Pope John himself did not suspect what was being planned” by them, “There can be no doubt that the Fathers were deliberately misled...”

## **7. The Orientation of the Celebrant**

“From the time Christians were first allowed to build churches, they constructed them along an east-west axis” (MD p. 405). The celebrant and congregation would worship towards the east which symbolizes the Heavenly Jerusalem and the coming of Christ, where the church entrance was situated in the eastern side of the church (as in the Basilica of St. Peter’s in Rome). The congregation would turn towards the east for the Canon of the Mass and turn towards the celebrant when he addressed them, for example, during the sermon. The Mass was never celebrated versus populum, either in the western or in the eastern tradition where the iconostasis would indeed have deprived it of any sense.

The sense of the Mass versus Dominum with the celebrant at the head of the congregation is that it expresses the fact that the priest offers the Mass with, and on behalf of, the people. The concept of a celebration deliberately orientated to face the people was an invention of Martin Luther (MD p. 400).

This practice was introduced into the Catholic Church by a series of documents. Article 124 of Sacrosanctum Concilium recommends that new churches should be “suitable for the celebration of liturgical services and for active participation of the faithful”; the 1964 document *Inter Oecumenici* expands the scope of this provision to include old churches and adds that it is better (*praestat*) that altars should be freestanding; the 1969 General Instruction cites the latter provision as an alleged authority that “the main altar should be (” rather than it be better that it be “) constructed away from the wall, so that one can move around it without difficulty and so that it can be used for a celebration facing the people” (MD p. 408-10).

## **8. Altar and Table**

The supreme function of the Church is to worship God, and the supreme expression of this worship is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on a consecrated altar in a church consecrated for this purpose. The altar represents Christ, Who sacrificed Himself on the altar of His Own body. The altar must be of stone because it represents Christ, Who is the living foundation and cornerstone of the Church. It must be covered with three linen cloths which represent the Church, and the cloths with which He was wrapped in the tomb. The altar should be elevated since it is a mystical Mount Calvary[6]. It is incensed, and adorned with a cross, which enables priest and people frequently to gaze upon the image of the Crucified. It (and the tabernacle) is hung with frontal hangings which represent the saints with which the great King is clothed in glory. The altar contains the relics of the martyrs (cf. MD p. 389 - 393).

In contrast to this Catholic theology of the altar, Cranmer states (MD p. 413-14): “First, the form of a table shall more move the simple from the superstitious opinions of the Popish Mass unto the right use of the Lord’s Supper. For the use of an altar is to make sacrifice upon it: the use of a table is to serve men to eat upon.”

In regard to the Postconciliar liturgical revolution, Michael Davies notes that “not one of the mandatory requirements (such as those mentioned above) developed over two thousand years to ensure that the altar which represents Christ is of fitting dignity, has been retained by the Conciliar Church” (MD p. 395). And we observe that, in effect, in the vast majority of cases, the altar has been supplanted by a table, despite Pope Pius XII’s categorical prohibition of this in *Mediator Dei* (MD p. 416).

Michael Davies further remarks (p. 413) that “the Mass versus populum and the ... table are part of the same phenomenon, the Protestantization of the Catholic liturgy. It is a carbon copy of what took place at the Reformation.”

### **9. Intelligibility and Participation**

Clearly any form of public action needs to be intelligible and participated. The Council of Trent decreed that the Holy Mass according to the Old Rite was to be rendered intelligible to the



faithful, and the Catechism of Trent in its turn constantly stresses the obligation of the parish priest to explain the mysteries of the Faith in general, and of the Holy Mass in particular.[7]

The Liturgical Movement under Dom Guéranger undertook to explain in detail its various texts and component parts. This work of catechism enabled the faithful to participate more fully in the Holy Mass: externally with the responses and chant, but above all internally[8] in the highest act of which man is capable, that is, the act of adoration which is the Holy Mass, and in particular, the act of oblation and immolation of the faithful in union with the Holy Sacrifice of Mount Calvary.

The celebration with which Martin Luther and the other reformers replaced the Mass also needed to be intelligible and participated in by the people. Since these celebrations were essentially communitarian, anthropocentric actions, the intelligibility and participation were achieved largely by translating the Latin into the vernacular and eliminating the silence (see

above). The language became purely communicative and lost its “sacral stylization” that “forms an essential element of any official prayer language” in the words of Prof. Christine Mohrmann (MD p.362), a sacral stylization that is directed towards union with God.

As far as the New Rite is concerned, a certain Fr. Peter Coughlan, a member of the Secretariat of the Consilium, remarked of the liturgical reform[9] that “its main thrust may be summed up under two heads: intelligibility and participation...they set in motion a process which has not yet ceased” (MD p. 28) - a prophetic utterance indeed, as Michael Davies rightly remarks.

At this point we may ask ourselves why, if the principal objective of the liturgical reform was to make the Holy Mass intelligible, it has failed in this task: for ignorance as to the nature of the Holy Mass is wide-spread, indeed almost universal.[10] The answer must lie in the fact that the faithful understand the Mass as they experience it and as it is represented to them: not as the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary, but as an anthropocentric, communitarian action[11]: in other words not according to Catholic, but according to Protestant, theology.

In regard to the intelligibility of the New Rite, language is no longer used for a sacred purpose, but for communication between man and man. Even the words of consecration, spoken aloud and subtly altered, become the medium of communication, of “narrative”: important in their reception and not in their utterance, in what they convey and not in what they actuate - as though *Fiat lux* had been said in order to be heard.

Speaking of the attacks on the Latin language in the Mass, Fr. Nicholas Gehr writes that “Such attacks originated principally in a heretical, schismatical, proudly national spirit hostile to the Church or in a superficial and false enlightenment, in a shallow and arid rationalism entirely destitute of the perception and understanding of the essence and object of the Catholic liturgy, especially of the profoundly mystical sacrifice” (MD p. 358).

In regard to participation in the New Rite, the congregation no longer unites itself spiritually with the unfathomable mysteries of the Mass, but usurps the functions of the clergy with forays into the sanctuary to read the lessons or prayers, to bring up the offerings, or to open the tabernacle, rummage around in it, and distribute Holy Communion, as the *mulier idonea* [12] makes her appearance in the liturgy for the first time (Critical Study V), breaking with three and a half millennia of Judaeo-Christian Tradition.

Over and above this liturgical participation should be mentioned the social participation: the hand-shakes (or other greetings as indicated by respective cultural norms or levels of emotion), applause, laughter, and even dance[13].

We shall conclude this section by comparing the two forms of intelligibility and participation relating to the two rites. In the Old Rite intelligibility is the attempt to understand an unfathomable mystery, (to the extent to which a finite mind can do so): namely the re-enactment of the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary; participation is self-oblation in union with this

sacrifice. In the new rite intelligibility is fully to comprehend the Mass, no longer viewed as a mystery but as a simple community action; participation is to share in this action on an equal, or an almost equal, footing with the priest. In the Old Rite there is Faith and a sense of the Majesty of God; in the new rite rationalism and democracy (or egalitarianism)[14]; in the first case humility and theocentricism, in the second case pride and anthropocentricism[15].

Having drawn a comparison between the Old, the reformed, and the New, Rites in nine distinct cases, we add a final subsection on a number of elements concerning the Church and offensive to Protestant ecclesiology, which have been eliminated from the Roman Rite (cf. Critical Study V 3).

### **[Notes:]**

**[1]** Pope Pius XI writes in *Officiorum Omnium* (1922): "... the Church, precisely because it embraces all nations and is destined to endure until the end of time... of its very nature requires a language which is universal, immutable, and non-vernacular." (MD p.377)

**[2]** *Si quis dixerit, Ecclesiae Romanae ritum, quo submissa voce pars canonis et verba consecrationis proferuntur, damnandum esse; aut lingua tantum vulgari Missam celebrari debere...Anathema sit: If any-one were to say that the rite of the Roman Church in which a part of the Canon and the words of consecration are uttered in a low voice is to be condemned; or that the Mass is to be celebrated only in the vernacular...AS*

**[3]** This rationale, which has re-surfaced in the contemporary liturgical debate, is at once the most wide-spread and the most superficial argument against the Latin liturgy. To reject something simply because one cannot understand it is a conduct unworthy of a man. Let the arguments in favour of Latin enumerated here suffice to justify the minimal effort required to consult vernacular translations during the Sacred Mysteries.

**[4]** Pope Pius XII writes in *Mediator Dei* (1947) that "the use of Latin prevailing in a great part of the Church affords...an effective safeguard against the corruption of true doctrine." (MD p.377)

**[5]** Pope Paul VI in *Sacrificium Laudis* (1966) calls the Latin language "the richest treasury of piety." (MD p.378)

**[6]** and also because it represents God as stable, eternal, and exalted (*Iota Unum* 290 p.644).

**[7]** the Council of Trent, S. 22, ch.8 decrees: "...mandat sancta Synodus pastoribus et singulis curam animarum gerentibus, ut frequenter inter Missarum celebrationem vel per se vel per alios ex his, quae in Missa leguntur, exponant atque inter cetera sanctissimi huius sacrificii mysterium aliquod declarent, diebus praesertim Dominicis et festis the holy Synod commands pastors and all those who have the care of souls, that, either themselves or through others, they expound and declare inter alia something about the the mystery of this most Holy Sacrament, particularly

on Sundays and Feast-days.” The Roman Catechism duly declares at the beginning of its treatment of the Sacrament of the Eucharist that “...parish priests must expound with the utmost diligence everything that can help to illustrate the majesty of the Eucharist...” etc.

**[8]** cf. the Instruction on Sacred Music and Sacred Liturgy 22a (Sacred Congregation of Rites 1958, quoting Mediator Dei of Pope Pius XII 1947, with its reference to St.Paul): “This participation must in the first place be internal, actuated with a devout attention of the mind and with the affection of the heart, by means of which the faithful, ‘unite themselves most intimately with the High Priest...and with Him and for Him offer (the sacrifice) and give themselves with Him.’ ”

**[9]** in his book “The New Mass: a Pastoral Guide”(1969).

**[10]** The author of this essay has given a number of lectures on the Holy Mass to young Catholics and to parishioners of Novus Ordo parishes: no-one has yet been able to tell him what it is.

**[11]** as a commemorative meal, for example – see the earlier footnote on this misconception.

**[12]** or minus idonea

**[13]** Despite all these liturgical and social innovations, a number of faithful, after having attended the Old rite for the first time, have confided to the author that they have been able to participate in it better than in the New Rite.

**[14]** corresponding to the spirit of the clergy at the outset of the Second Vatican Council

**[15]** see Part II of this essay [The Cult of God and the Cult of Man, to be posted in parts VII and VIII next week]