

The Roman Missal of Saint Paul VI  
A witness to unchanging faith and uninterrupted tradition  
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(Translated from the original Italian text)

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At a General Audience in 1965, four years before promulgating the Roman Missal renewed by decree of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Saint Paul VI said:

“It is good that it be perceived as the very authority of the Church to wish, to promote, to ignite this new manner of prayer, thus greatly increasing her spiritual mission [...]; and we must not hesitate to first become disciples then supporters of the school of prayer, which is about to begin.”<sup>1</sup>

The journey that had led to this moment had indeed been a long one, but one which had been influenced by discovery as well as a recognition by successive Popes that there was need for a renewal of the Church’s liturgy. In the words of Pope Francis, “when a need is perceived, even if the solution is not immediate, there is a necessity that it be set in motion.”<sup>2</sup>

The history of the Roman Rite in the first seven centuries of the Church’s history is fraught with difficulty. Unlike the Liturgies of Jerusalem and Antioch during the same period, there is little written material to assist us. This has given rise to many hypotheses that cannot be accurately tested due to the lack of documentation.

The *Liber Pontificalis* of Pope Zephyrinus (199-217) which provides us with some indications is, in the words of Father Louis Duchesne, “as important as it is obscure, and its obscurity is the more regrettable as the ceremonies of the Roman Mass in the fifth and sixth centuries are very little known.”<sup>3</sup>

The difficulties proposed by what ‘little is known’ in these centuries of the Roman usage are so complex that it would profit little to expand a detailed description in this presentation which would pose more questions than can be answered. Suffice it to say, that in these days of overstated and often ill-informed polemics regarding the ‘hermeneutics of reform in continuity’, as coined by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2005

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, General Audience, 13 January 1965

<sup>2</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 68th National Liturgical Week in Italy, 24 August 2017.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Liber Pontificalis*, vol. I, 139, n.3. L. Duchesne (1886)

address to the Roman Curia,<sup>4</sup> we must be careful to pay careful attention to what is known and, above all, what has been handed on to the Church by Conciliar and papal Magisterium in faithfulness to the Lord and at the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Over 2000 years have passed since the celebration of the first Eucharist in the Upper Room and its dramatic unfolding in the city of Jerusalem. The importance of what happened then was immediately understood by the Apostles as we learn from the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Their custody of this great gift, in faithfulness to him who said, 'do this in memory of me' and who gave his own life for the life of the world, was entrusted with great care to the Christian communities of the newly founded churches.<sup>6</sup>

The year 2020 celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the renewed Roman Missal promulgated by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and the papal decree of Saint Paul VI on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1969, which was issued almost a year before the publication and use of the *Missale Romanum* together with the *Missale Romanum Lectionarium*.<sup>7</sup> In the Apostolic Constitution, Saint Paul VI recalls the previous restoration of the Roman Missal by Saint Pius V<sup>8</sup> following the Council of Trent which itself initiated the continuation of a renewed interest in the Sacred Liturgy that had its culmination four hundred years later. Indeed the adoption of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on the 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1963, was exactly four-hundred years after the closing session of the Council of Trent.

The Roman Missal of Saint Pius V was published in 1570 under the title, *Missale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum Pii V Pontificis Maximi iussu editum* which, subsequently, mentions the revisions of three other Popes including Saint John XXIII in 1962. The editions of the Roman Missal of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council (1970, 1975, 2002) have as their title *Missale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP VI promulgatum*. Please note the words used in the Missal of 1570 'restitutum', restored; and that of the Missal of 1970 'instauratum', renewed to which, in the 2002 *editio typica tertia*, was added the phrase 'Ioannis Pauli PP. II cura recognitum' – 'revised with care'. What was begun in 1570 found its culmination in 1970 because of the discovery of important liturgical sources that were not available in the sixteenth century and for which reason, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council called for a renewal of the Missal. It is clear that this decision was part

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<sup>4</sup> Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to The Roman Curia offering Them His Christmas Greetings, Thursday, 22 December 2005

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:28-35

<sup>6</sup> Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

<sup>7</sup> *Id est, Missale Romanum* and the *Missale Romanum Lectionarium* vol I, II, III LEV 1970)

<sup>8</sup> The *Missale Romanum* of 1570 was in fact begun by Pope Pius IV and completed by Pope St Pius V.

of a process that had already begun, in one sense, prior to Trent and which continued afterwards with the Missal of Saint Pius V as well as the revisions made during the pontificates of Clement VIII, Urban VIII, Pius X, Leo XIII, Benedict XV, Pius XII and John XXIII. In reality, the Council of Trent left the reform to the Pope, whereas the Second Vatican Council itself specifically asked that:

“The rite of the Mass is to be revised in such a way that the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, may be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved. For this purpose, the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage, are now to be discarded; other elements which have suffered injury through accidents of history are now to be restored to the vigour which they had in the days of the holy Fathers, as may seem useful or necessary.”<sup>9</sup>

We must not forget, amongst many other things, but particularly pertinent to the Missal, that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* required that a greater use should be made of the Sacred Scriptures and that vernacular languages should be more widely employed. So it was, that on the feast of St Jerome in 1970 the three volume Lectionary of the Roman Missal was published under the title *Missale Romanum Lectionarium*.

The desire of both the Council Fathers and Saint Paul VI was that the liturgy should be simplified in order to make it more accessible. While the Missal retains the basic structure of that of Saint Pius V, together with ninety percent of the texts of that Missal, it removes a number of repetitions and accretions and simplifies the language and the gestures of the liturgy. At the same time, it uses more sacrificial vocabulary than was the case in the 1570 Missal. Opinions to the contrary are false. As Saint Paul VI said to the members of the Consilium, “Liturgy is like a strong tree whose beauty is derived from the continuous renewal of its leaves, but whose strength comes from the old trunk, with solid roots in the ground.”<sup>10</sup>

Like every council of the Church, the Council of Trent,<sup>11</sup> which was the nineteenth ecumenical council, was called to address the challenges and opportunities of the age and to steer the Church aright for future generations through reconciliation and a program of reform. It is highly significant that the principal vehicles of this council, like that of the twenty-first ecumenical council, were the revision of the Roman Missal

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<sup>9</sup> "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium". Vatican.va. 4 December 1963.

<sup>10</sup> Allocuzione di Paolo VI ai componenti del «*Consilium ad Exsequendam Constitutionem de Sacra Liturgia*», 29 October 1964.

<sup>11</sup> 1545-1563

and Breviary, decrees regarding the Sacraments, the commissioning of a standard version of the Latin Vulgate, the issuing of the Roman Catechism, together with the strengthening of the place of sacred music and art as well as the reform of the clergy, seminaries and other religious institutions. All highly important elements in the revival of the Church for its age and time. But, not even Trent could achieve the thorough reform of what many would have assessed as the deplorable state of the Liturgy prior to that Council.

Trent gave evident impetus to many developments whose effects continue to this very day and which had consequences, which were further evident in the First and Second Vatican Councils. This history itself clearly demonstrates the 'hermeneutics of reform in continuity'

Just as the Council of Trent was itself influenced by the rising of tides from the late mediaeval period, so too Trent gave impetus to the biblical, patristic, liturgical and, surprisingly, ecumenical movements which influenced the Second Vatican Council, yet which in one sense were only understood progressively through the next four-hundred years as the Church once again faced its mission in the world to be the leaven in the dough.

The Second Vatican Council which followed an unprecedented period of world wars which, unfortunately, had been initiated by some of the most Christian countries of Europe, was a decisive response to a world that had changed and was changing rapidly not through religious disagreement but, in the main, by the failure of Christian countries to live at many levels from the depths of the gospel which they espoused. The world stood at the threshold of a political, economic, social and religious collapse and, unlike the calling of the Council of Trent, which although called in 1537 did not take place until 1545 because of the wrangling between Church and State as to where the Council should be held, Vatican II was called with immediate speed to give prophetic witness and new vigour to the mission of the Church.

It was already clear through the teachings of successive Popes that the ecclesiology of the Church as well as its liturgical practice were being examined more closely through the developments that had been made in Biblical studies and in the discovery of patristic and liturgical sources that hitherto had not been readily available to theologians in past ages.

It must also be kept in mind that the Second Vatican Council for the first time ever solemnly proclaimed a body of doctrine on the Church which is now part of the Church's Magisterium. The Conciliar Documents, not least *Lumen Gentium*, replaced the

previous notion of the Church as a perfect society and a world power to be contended with, with that of the Church as sacrament and the biblical concept of the People of God – a pilgrim people - constantly open to reform and conversion. This is not an unimportant teaching when addressing the ecclesiological differences between the liturgies of Trent and that of Vatican II as can be seen clearly in the Roman Missal of Paul VI, in particular the *Ordo Missae*, which reflects and expresses a vision of the Church at prayer as so succinctly expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

“The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all.”<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the liturgy is above all an action of God himself - what he does - that is, the Father through his Son and in the Holy Spirit - and to which the People of God respond, here on earth but also in heaven. It is the action of the *Christus totus*. The ‘recapitulated in Christ’ are the ones who “take part in the service of the praise of God and the fulfilment of his plan.”<sup>13</sup> This is in contrast to a solely clerical vision of the liturgy, in which the clergy alone are active and the faithful passive. To illustrate the dawning consciousness of this emerging ecclesiology prior to the Second Vatican Council, there was a small, yet highly significant, change made to the rubrics of the Easter Vigil by Pope Pius XII. Previously, the rubric concerning the lighting of the paschal fire spoke only of the priest whereas Pius XII added, for the first time in the rubrics of the Mass, the need for the people to witness what was taking place so as to be more part of what was happening.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.48

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.1138

<sup>14</sup> *Missale Romanum*, 1933: “Sacerdos ... ante portam ecclesiae, si commode potest, vel in ipso aditu ecclesiae benedicit novum ignem.” (The priest, in front of the church door, if it is convenient, or at the entrance of the church, blesses the new fire.); *Missale Romanum*, 1962: “Sacerdos ... sive in aditu ecclesiae, vel intus eam, ubi scilicet populus ritum sacrum melius sequi possit, celebrans benedicit novum ignem.” (The priest celebrating blesses the new fire, whether at the entrance of the church or inside it, so that the people may better follow the sacred rite.)

In liturgy, it is the ecclesial body as a whole that is convoked, sanctified, renewed, converted, and who, together with the priest, celebrate.<sup>15</sup> *‘Non muti spectatores ... sed etiam una cum ipso (sacerdos) offerentes, seipsos offerere discant’*.<sup>16</sup> This, also, is why preference must always be given in liturgical worship to the community celebration as opposed to the individual or semi-private celebrations.<sup>17</sup> The liturgy is the action of the “whole Christ”.<sup>18</sup> It is not that the community celebration of itself has more ‘value’, but because it manifests the ecclesial character of every liturgical celebration more clearly. The Eucharist is offered in the name of the whole Church. It is the principle sign of unity – the greatest bond of charity. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it:

“The celebrating assembly is the community of the baptised who “by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices.”<sup>19</sup>

The *Ordo Missae* of the Tridentine Missal considered the priest alone as celebrant – the things concerning him, what he had to say and do etc. The people did not appear at all. It is interesting to compare the opening remarks of the *Ritus servandus in celebratione Missae* of the Missal prior to the Council and the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani* of the Missal after the Council. The first begins with the words ‘*Sacerdos celebraturus Missam*’,<sup>20</sup> while the conciliar Missal begins with the phrase, ‘*Cenam paschalem cum discipulis celebraturus*.’ In order to understand the magnitude of the changes that have taken place, one has only to recall that in the Tridentine Missal the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful had no official place in the celebration of the Mass, but was later drawn from and inserted into the Mass from the distribution of Communion outside the Mass.<sup>21</sup>

*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.31, made it very clear that the rubrics of the liturgical books must also contain indications concerning the faithful, i.e., as to their direct involvement (active, pious, conscious participation) in the celebration, seen as the action of a body in which each one does his part for the good of the whole.

Bearing these fundamental elements in mind, the revised *Missale Romanum* of Saint Paul VI was greatly enriched and revised, not least by the inclusions of a new corpus of

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<sup>15</sup> *Missale Romanum*, GIRM 95-97

<sup>16</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.48

<sup>17</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1140

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* n. 1136

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* N 1141

<sup>20</sup> The *Missale Romanum* of 1933 reads *Sacerdos celebraturus Missam*, while the Missal of 1962 reads *Sacerdos Missam celebraturus*.

<sup>21</sup> *Rituale Romanum: Ordo Administrandi Sacram Communionem*, anno 1614.

readings and gospel passages from the Sacred Scriptures, the enrichment and the revision of the euchology, especially prefaces, the sanctoral cycle, ritual masses and those for various needs, which takes into account pastoral situations, and the spiritual needs of the particular communities. Also amongst the many recoveries was the introduction of the possibility of concelebrating the Mass, not least on the day that the Sacred Chrism is consecrated and the oils for the sacraments blessed.

The first criteria used for this enrichment came from a greater understanding of the need to make the Sacred Scriptures more readily available for the nourishment of the People of God and which were to be venerated.<sup>22</sup> This itself, although not exclusively, is an ecclesial and liturgical action. Indeed the Canon of the Scriptures came about through the liturgical use of them by the Church. This was a recovery. The Lectionary of today's Missal, with its Sunday cycles - holidays and weekdays of biblical readings, is the implementation of the principles desired by the Council Fathers.<sup>23</sup>

The second criteria came from the discovery of the earliest sources of euchology - the ancient sacramentaries, which were not known by the reformers of Trent. This also gave an opening to a greater appreciation of the liturgies of the East in enriching, for example, the formulas of the Eucharistic Prayers.

And thirdly, through the reception of the theological content of the Second Vatican Council itself which was ecclesologically significant and cognisant of a world that had changed. As Pope Saint John Paul II said in his post-millennial address, the Second Vatican Council is a "sure compass to guide the entire Church into the future"<sup>24</sup>

In an age when there are those who are easily drawn into opposing camps of rigid opinion regarding liturgical reform, it is worth reminding ourselves that the Church is *semper reformanda* and, in direct line with the 'hermeneutics of reform in continuity,' Pope Francis recalls:

"The Council and the reform are two directly linked events, which did not blossom suddenly but after long preparation. ...

"The Second Vatican Council then brought to fruition, as the good fruit from the tree of the Church, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (sc), ensuring that its lines of general reform responded to real needs and to the concrete hope of renewal: it desired a vital liturgy for a Church wholly enlivened by the mysteries celebrated. It was a matter of expressing in a renewed

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<sup>22</sup> Dei Verbum, nn. 21-22

<sup>23</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium, nn.24, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Novo Millennio Ineunte, n.57

way the perennial vitality of the Church in prayer, taking care “that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration” (SC, 48).

The Holy Father went on to note that it is important to gain a profound appreciation of the criteria underlying the reform of the liturgy:

“... by rediscovering the reasons for the decisions taken with regard to the liturgical reform, by overcoming unfounded and superficial readings, a partial reception, and practices that disfigure it. It is not a matter of rethinking the reform by reviewing the choices in its regard, but of knowing better the underlying reasons, through historical documentation, as well as of internalizing its inspirational principles and of observing the discipline that governs it. ... The direction traced by the Council was in line with the principle of respect for healthy tradition and legitimate progress (cf. SC, 23), in the liturgical books promulgated by Blessed Paul VI, well received by the very Bishops who were present at the Council, and now in universal use for almost 50 years in the Roman Rite.”<sup>25</sup>

Fifty years is not a long time in the history of the Church. The reform has happened; it still remains our ecclesial duty to implement that reform with great care and deep respect. The fiftieth anniversary is a time to renew that ecclesial commission at every level in the Church. I end by echoing the words of Pope Benedict XVI who wrote:

"The most sure guarantee that the Missal of Paul VI can unite parish communities and be loved by them consists in its being celebrated with great reverence in harmony with the liturgical directives. This will bring out the spiritual richness and the theological depth of this Missal."<sup>26</sup>

✠ Arthur ROCHE  
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<sup>25</sup> Address by Pope Francis to the 68th National Liturgical Week in Italy, 24 August 2017

<sup>26</sup> Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to The Bishops on the occasion of the publication of The Apostolic Letter "*Motu Proprio Data*" *Summorum Pontificum* on the use of the Roman Liturgy prior to the reform of 1970 (7 July 2007)



