

# *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

## The Revised Translation of the Roman Missal: PART I

Ever since *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, was published in 1963 as one of the 16 landmark documents of the historic Second Vatican Council, there's been a buzz about the look, feel and sound of Catholic liturgy. Some say that the pre-conciliar liturgy in Latin was more "pure," "more uniquely Catholic," and "more spiritual." Others bemoan the upcoming changes in the Missal, seeing the new translations as an effort to restore the pre-Vatican II "Latinness" of the Catholic experience.

Before any conversation about the present day brokenness or fixedness of the Sacred Liturgy and the Missal that guides it can happen, it's essential to remember that, as easy as it may be to think of the Catholic mass as we knew it before 1964 as being a timeless, static, monolithic expression directly linked to the ancient practices of the early church, that assumption would get us off to an erroneous (and dangerous) start.

The fact is, the Church through its 2000 year history, while holding tenaciously to the *central* tenets of its Faith, has been in equal measure adroitly adaptive and culturally accommodating in its practices. Throughout the centuries there has been an ebb and flow of tradition and innovation that has not only echoed, but which, somewhat paradoxically, has been both reactively formed by, and proactively formative of, the movements of secular culture and society.

Up until the fourth century, with the obvious exception of the central focus of Jesus as the Messianic prophetic fulfillment, the Christian Eucharistic Celebration looked and sounded more like a highly-inculturated Jewish Sabbath service than a "Roman" mass.

Through the next centuries, as the Church moved further in influence from its Mediterranean coastal roots and grew nearly exponentially in numbers, the communities of the major centers of population began to more intentionally codify their local practices of liturgy. During these early centuries, Greek, the universal language of commerce and

education, was used as the common ecclesial language. Alexandria, Antioch, Rome and Byzantium, Constantine's new capital of the Roman Empire, emerged as power centers, and each developed locally adapted rites.

In the 5th century, as the Roman Empire began to fall to the successive invasions of the Gauls, Visigoths and Vandals, and new languages were introduced into what was once the Roman Empire, Latin began to replace Greek as the official language of the Church.

In the same curious way that the dissipation of the Roman Empire contributed to the emergence of a unifying Latin language as the official tongue of the increasingly disparate church, so, the Roman Rite (itself significantly influenced by the rites of Gaul and Antioch) emerged in the Middle Ages as the unifying rite that bound Christendom.

In the 8th century, with the collaboration of Emperor Charlemagne, and Pope Gregory the Great, came the "Gregorian Sacramentary," a combination of the Gallican rites of Charlemagne's empire and the Roman rites of the Mediterranean, the foundation of today's *Novus Ordo*.

Throughout the Early Renaissance and the Age of Discovery, the essential structure of Catholic liturgy remained unchanged, but the role of music in ritual, especially the mass, went through a significant revolution. Where plain chant (unaccompanied singing of scriptural texts in unharmonized, unison form) had been the norm through the Middle Ages and, over two centuries, codified to a stylized form through the endorsement of the Church and popes like Gregory the Great, in the centuries to follow a new form of music called polyphony (compositions made up of various lines of melody and harmony intersecting) began to develop in the secular world and soon became an integral part of Catholic liturgy.

As an exciting array of new instruments were introduced into liturgy, not least among them, the bellows-powered multi-voiced instrument we've come to know as the organ, liturgical music left the model of simple monophonic melody and became ornate and complex.

The post Renaissance centuries proved to be among the most tumultuous in the Church's history.

On the heels of ecclesial abuses like its interventions in political affairs (among them, the Hundred Years War between England and France,) its practice of selling of indulgences and trading of ecclesial appointments to finance

cathedral building and Catholic expansion in Europe and the New World, all across Europe critics like Wycliffe, Hus, Luther and Zwingli incited what was to become the Protestant Reformation. Break-away churches, eager to remove any hint of Catholic clericalism, began to compose religious hymns with simple melodies drawn from secular sources, and Catholic leaders responded by cracking down on the use of popular music and secular instruments, and by "ordaining" the organ as the only acceptable musical instrument of the Church. Just as importantly, during this Catholic Counter Reformation, the Council of Trent took measures to further codify the rites of liturgy, forming what has become known as the Tridentine Mass, the form in universal use from the 16th to the mid 20th century. The Church clarified its understanding of sacramental doctrine, recomposed liturgical prayers to offer catechetical instruction for the faithful, and stemmed the flow of what had become the rather common use of cultural adaptations.

In the high Renaissance period of the late 1400's and early 1500's, the Church acknowledged that liturgical music had become so complex that it had taken on an artistic life of its own, and the Holy See commissioned gifted composers like Giovanni Palestrina to restore liturgical music to its more accessible, simple, but never "Protestant populist" forms.

As we think of the ebb-and flow of freedom and restraint, tradition and innovation in Catholic liturgy, it is important to remember that, whether we look far back to ancient polytheistic Sumeria or fast-forward to modern day San Francisco, or move from liturgy's Christian inception in post-resurrection Jerusalem on to its adjustments in the upcoming Third Edition of the Roman Missal, the history of liturgy has been the history of human beings doing the best they can, with the best tools they have available, to voice their understanding of and response to the ineffable, the mysterious, the experienced yet never fully expressable.

Next week's column will explore the development of liturgical reforms from the Age of Enlightenment through the Post-Modern era of the 20th and 21st centuries.

=====  
On Saturday, September 19, the Archdiocesan Office of Worship is sponsoring a workshop on the Roman Missal for parish and school leaders. Please see <http://sfworship.blogspot.com/2009/08/deepening-renewal-new-english.html> for details, or call Pat Vallez-Kelly at 415-614-5586. **END OF PART I==PART 2 follows below....**

# *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

## The Revised Translation of the Third Edition Roman Missal: PART II

Whether it's been the Council of Jerusalem in 50 AD, or the new translations which will be part of the Third Edition Roman Missal moving toward Church approval in 2010, the history of liturgy has been the history of human beings doing the best they can, with the best tools they have available, to voice their understanding of and response to the ineffable, the mysterious, the experienced yet never fully expressible, divine.

No better is this illustrated than in the succession of theological and liturgical developments that accompanied the quick-paced movements of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

First among the these modern era movements would be the writings of Pope Leo XIII, whose 1898 encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, lifted the nearly 400-year-old Counter Reformation ban on the translating of scripture. Soon to come in in 1903 and 1905 were Pius X's *Acerbo Nimis*, which instructed pastors and teachers to make scriptural literacy an expectation not only for clergy, but for laity as well, and *Tra le sollecitudini*, an instruction on music in the liturgy which encouraged singing from the congregation. Pius XII (1939-58) continued to support academic inquiry into scripture with his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, directing the study of scripture in original languages by all clerics and teachers. Pius XII also opened the door to our contemporary understanding of liturgy as a fully participative experience with his prophetic for its time pronouncements: "We no longer need to bring the people to the mass, we must bring the mass to the people...." "The people offer the mass through the hands of the Priest...." And "the laity shares in the priesthood of Christ."

Throughout its history, the Church has relied on the inspiration of the Spirit, realizing full well that the Spirit works through the visceral and sweaty human exercises of scholarship, research and analysis. Whether it was the early theological writings of Augustine and Irenaeus, the Medieval philosophical work of Thomas Aquinas, or the Renaissance efforts of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis de Sales, it was theologians and philosophers committed to grappling with,

and ever more keenly appreciating the evolutionary nature of understanding the Mysteries of God, Christ and the Church, who advised the Magisterium and helped set the course for its constantly-unfolding and ever-deepening comprehension of Faith and Practice.

Two factors mark the theological and liturgical movement of the 20th century as different from that of the preceding millennia.

First, the intent of the conversations raised in the modern era, and the of councils called around those conversations, was neither to define beliefs nor to defend attacks. Rather, the intent was to explore the elemental question: "If this is WHAT we believe, then HOW do we act that belief into the world beyond the confines of Church?"

Second, in this new movement, wisdom would be sought not only from traditional theological sources, but through the inclusion of modern academic and secular disciplines in the Church's study of itself. Illustrating this impetus, throughout the 1930's, 40's and 50's, thinkers like Jesuit Henri Lubac (who institutionalized the study of Ecclesiology—the examination of the social-cultural nature of church), Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx (who raised Christology from a discipline that formerly dealt with defining heresy to a passionate inquiry into the complex nature of Jesus, the Love of God Incarnate), Jesuit Augustine Bea (whose sociological/historical approach to scripture planted the seeds for future ecumenical efforts), Dominican Yves Congar (whose study of the sacraments introduced the concepts of the universal call, lay and cleric alike, to holiness), Jesuit anthropologist and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (who brought these sciences into the realm of spiritual thought) and Jesuit Karl Rahner (whose insights on Grace as the natural state of all creation) all set the stage for a refreshing and dramatic revisioning of Catholic doctrine and practice.

With this background, the Church was prepared for its most significant movement toward further exploring the depth of the Catholic Imagination: the convening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), and, of most particular interest to liturgy, the proclamation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

Perhaps the most obvious reform of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was its recommendation that "local authorities direct decisions on whether, and to what extent, the vernacular will be introduced within their jurisdiction." This

set in motion the translation of the liturgical prayers of the Roman Missal, (called the Sacramentary in English speaking countries) and the three-year cycle rotation of scriptural readings (the Lectionary,) a process which continues today as we anticipate the introduction of the new Third Edition Roman Missal in 2011.

The first round of official Latin-to-vernacular translations came out in 1969, and were guided by the principle of "dynamic equivalence," a strategy in which context plays more of a role in translation than does literal text rendering. Sixteen years later, a second edition of the English "dynamic equivalent" Sacramentary came out in 1985. Fifteen years later, in 2000, the Church began to prepare for further translation revisions which would constitute the upcoming Third Edition of the Roman Missal.

The first step in this new-millennial revision process was the 2001 publication of the Vatican document *Liturgiam Authenticam*, instructing that texts be translated not with paraphrase and glosses for dynamic equivalence of the 1969 edition, but with "formal equivalence," encouraging interpretations to be more literally reflective of the original Latin and more universally synonymous in the multitude of languages into which it is translated.

With its focus on formal equivalency, the Third Edition of the Roman Missal, is expected to be receive official Vatican *recognitio* in 2010, and,, depending upon committee and bishops' approval, will likely replace the Sacramentary in parishes in 2011. While at first read, such a shift might be seen as a retreat back to Trent, a demonstration of clerical authority over pastoral wisdom, further investigation might lead to an appreciation that the changes (such as the movement in the Communion prayer from "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you..." to "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof..." are efforts to recapture the power of the scriptural references (such as the Roman centurion's humble and faith-infused reply to Jesus' suggestion that he come to his house to cure his son), from which liturgical prayers and dialogues are drawn.

Acknowledging that advance education on the Third Edition Roman Missal is essential for it to be an effective tool for expressing, experiencing and developing faith, the Archdiocese of San Francisco is planning a concerted catechesis on this Third Edition of the Roman Missal, plans for which will be announced in the months to come.

**REFERENCE TO SATURDAY WORKSHOP.....**