

On Substantial and Accidental Change in the Liturgical Texts

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In his magisterial work *Enchiridion Liturgicum*, Polycarp Radó, O.S.B. proves the thesis:

The sacred liturgy does not beget, but follows upon faith, expresses it, and for this reason is an excellent theological *locus*.^[1]

Such a statement is proven clearly by Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* and *Munificentissimus Deus*, and Radó assigns the first two parts of this thesis the theological note of *fidei proxima*.^[2] In the latter Apostolic Constitution, Pius XII states that:

the liturgy of the Church does not engender the Catholic faith, but rather springs from it, in such a way that the practices of the sacred worship proceed from the faith as the fruit comes from the tree.

Such an argument goes back at least as far as St. Augustine of Hippo in his *De dono perseverantiae*.^[3]

While this author certainly commends Dom Alcuin Reid, O.S.B. for his emphasis on the objectivity of the liturgical tradition and

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otherwise providing a beautiful and otherwise theologically accurate reflection on these matters in his recent article on “liturgical integrity”, one must part company with his criticism of Pius XII’s teaching in *Mediator Dei* on the primacy of faith before the liturgy as being a “deeply troubling exegesis.”[4] One can sympathize with Reid’s intent to safeguard the authentic liturgical tradition, but it would seem that such a critique of the liturgical understanding of Pius XII would not be the appropriate way to do so.

Radó very succinctly and rationally argues for the aforementioned understanding provided by the magisterium of Pius XII on the basis of *agere sequitur esse*. [5] Reid contends that Pius XII, in elucidating this principle, somehow provided an opening to refashioning the liturgy after the Council on the basis of the “new theology” introduced by the Council. It is hard to see how this reading of Pius XII is in agreement with *Mediator Dei*’s principle that:

the integrity of faith and morals ought to be the special criterion of this sacred science [i.e., liturgy].

It seems self-evident that the two principles must go hand-in-hand, as orthodox theology and an orthodox approach to the liturgical texts must inextricably be bound together on the part of those responsible in the Church hierarchy for the care of divine worship. In this sense, then, the goal of restoring all things in Christ (the liturgy inclusive) must always start from the basis of the solid foundations of the Catholic Faith in sound theology and authentic philosophy. Herman A. P. Schmidt, S.J., in his monumental *Introductio in Liturgiam Occidentalem*, likewise gives important criteria for the use of the liturgy as a theological font. [6] He also goes on to anticipate the criticism posed by Reid, and argues that the adage “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” had been abused by modernists such as Tyrrell to argue that changes in prayer and worship would somehow produce an

evolution in theological mindset in such a way that the law of prayer would determine the law of belief.

In recent years, much has been written about the return of the pre-1955 Holy Week rites in certain circles in the Church. Indults have indeed been issued for communities such as the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter to utilize these rites on a temporary basis. Some authors have even gone so far as to criticize traditional priests for using the Pius XII Holy Week for the mere fact that these rites bear the stamp of Annibale Bugnini, who was principally responsible for concocting the *Novus Ordo Missae*. Some—*mirabile dictu!*—have even begun to question the missal and breviary reforms of St. Pius X, who himself described the liturgical rites at that time as being in a state of “squalor.”[7] It is not this author’s intention to painstakingly catalogue and describe the variations in the 1955 Holy Week liturgy from those which preceded it, since others have very capably documented these changes.

It is, though, at this point that the classic distinction between substance and accident must come into play. What must be said is that these changes are accidental to the celebration of the liturgy during these days—not much different from the variations found in the Dominican Missal or the Ambrosian Missal from the traditional Roman Rite. (By way of illustration, the Dominican Rite, as was the case in many other northern European usages, always had four lections in the fore-Mass of the Easter Vigil.) Furthermore, such changes are fully within the competency of the Supreme Legislator to impose, and no less of a Pontiff than Pius XII certainly agreed as much in *Mediator Dei* 49, that:

from time immemorial the ecclesiastical hierarchy has exercised this right in matters liturgical.

To Reid’s argument, it could be added: up until the “Copernican revolution” of changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council starting in late 1964, the liturgy has been altered accidentally, yes; substantially, no.

It should be said that Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, along with other courageous priests subsequent to the Council like Gommar DePauw and Yves Normandin, had no qualms about the doctrinal and liturgical exactitude of the 1962 Missal—revised Holy Week liturgies inclusive. While liturgists are free to research, discuss, and debate the historical growth and evolution of the liturgical texts as they have been handed down to us, for certain Catholics to continually wish to “wind back the clock” on the Roman Rite to a certain date (be it 1954, 1911, or even before!) is a slippery-slope phenomenon which is questionable at best. It betrays an understanding of the liturgy as being “*en chantier perpétuel*”—subject to the whim of liturgists, instead of being established by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It smacks of the questionable quest for novelty unleashed by the Council itself. There is no perfect liturgy this side of eternity—indeed, Radó documents that the liturgical texts themselves have contained historical and factual errors, and even, in the case of the pre-1955 Good Friday liturgy, have given rise to theological errors, in this case regarding the unconsecrated chalice being consecrated by the commingling with the Sacred Host.[8]

At worst, such a hyper-liturgicism can potentially lead to rebellion against the principle that those in hierarchical authority in the Church, including sainted Popes such as St. Pius X, have the right and duty to regulate the Church’s divine worship in consonance and harmony with the deposit of faith. It would seem to this author that to question the reforms of Pius XII would be tantamount to questioning the doctrinal integrity of this holy Pontiff who provided

such a clear and orthodox magisterium to the Church Universal and who himself expressed sincere concern and care for the Church's liturgical life. These accidental revisions are in no way comparable to the substantial alterations made to the Church's liturgy as demonstrated in practice from March 1965 onwards and evidenced by the removal of *Quo Primum* from all missals issued subsequent to the Second Vatican Council.

As the current editor and principal developer of the Divinum Officium Project, this author has constantly borne in mind that the 1962 books are normative and should thus be given priority in editing this resource. While the Project does provide the former liturgical texts as a research aid and didactic tool, the aim of this project, according to its original developer, the late Laszlo Kiss, was to demonstrate that the reforms of St. Pius X and John XXIII were not in any way radical.

The bishop of the author's diocese of Providence, Russell J. McVinney, who himself was quite critical and only begrudgingly accepting of the liturgical changes subsequent to the Council, expressed only positive praise for the 1955 Holy Week changes, even to the point of requesting that his diocesan priests write a 500-word essay for a clerical study day on the import and intent of this reform. McVinney stated that:

it goes without saying that each of us wishes to conform strictly to the directives of the Holy Father and to give the people the inspirational leadership which will bring them to a more fruitful observance of the impressive liturgy.

Several years later, an article by Fr. Henry J. Dziadosz, J.C.D. ably demonstrates that the 1960 rubrical code made "no radical changes in the structure or texts of the Mass." [9] As Michael Davies argued as well:

this rubrical reform had been ordered by Pope Pius XII, and few of the changes would have been noticed by the layman using a pre-1962 Missal.[11]

The same cannot, however, be said for the *Novus Ordo Missae* or even the changes implemented by *Inter Oecumenici* as the first-fruits of the *Consilium*. In researching how liturgical directives were implemented in this diocese, the author has discovered that prior to the conciliar changes imposed by *Inter Oecumenici*, the normal way in which the accidental changes were made to the liturgical books was by decree sent out through the chancellor's office. It was only after the implementation of "liturgical committees" to implement the Conciliar changes did the substantial destruction of the traditional Roman Rite begin in haste—this being a far cry from the diachronic identity of the Roman Rite which existed in reality until March 7, 1965, and which was already being previously undermined in places infected quickly with modernism, such as the Pontifical North American College.[11]

With these points in mind, a caveat must be made that the 1960 *codex rubricarum* does leave room for genuine development and/or legitimate wide interpretation, particularly since it is a legal axiom that favorable laws conceding rights merit broad interpretation. The Vatican *Ordo Recitandi* and the former Pontifical Commission *Ecclesia Dei* have given broad scope to permitting certain practices which, while not strictly in conformity with the rubrics of the 1962 books, are also not repugnant thereunto. For instance, the practice of the *Confiteor* before administration of Holy Communion has been justified, as well as the use of *Benedicamus Domino* in lieu of *Ite, Missa Est* in Masses where there is no *Gloria*. [12] One can also point to the recent decrees of *Cum Sanctissima* and *Quo Magis* in reference to recent additions of saints' feast days and prefaces.

In this author's opinion, focusing upon the restoration of pre-1960 rubrical forms and structures is, at best, a distraction from the necessity of a clear focus on the general restoration of the integrity of Catholic Tradition (specifically, theology, which must precede praxis) before the cataclysmic changes of the Second Vatican Council, and at worst, an expression of the hyper-liturgicism and search for antique novelty which *Mediator Dei* intended to correct. Some have even taken to critiquing the new Mass and Office issued by Pope Pius XII for the Assumption and his widely-accepted translation of the psalter, with the arguments for both being mainly aesthetic grounds, since these texts are theologically unimpeachable. In the case of the Pius XII psalter, this translation was accepted almost universally by the secular clergy for usage in the *Breviarium Romanum* in the decades preceding the Council.

On a spiritual and ascetical level, it can, in the minds of some Catholics attached to Tradition, potentially inculcate an elitist mindset, dividing those who attend the pre-1955 rites from those who are content with the normative 1962 liturgical books as they are. The same could be said for the usage of the Pius XII psalter. It is regrettable that some of these Catholics have forgotten the wise words of Davies that the 1962 Missal is a "rock of stability".[13] Ultimately, this desire to "restore the '54" should be perceived more along the lines of the "overeager search for novelty" spoken about by Pius XII, but in the reverse direction from the aims of the 1960's *Consilium*. One might even term it a sort of "reverse antiquarianism." After all, if one can question the decrees of a genuinely orthodox Pope such as Pius XII on the basis of liturgical aesthetics, why not also question the reforms of St. Pius X, or even the Council of Trent for that matter? As Pius XII stated himself:

it is neither wise nor laudable to reduce everything to antiquity by every possible device.[14]

Perhaps this discussion points to a larger issue in theology taken as a whole—namely, the exaggerated role that the liturgy has taken as a consequence of the Council and against which Pius XII sounded the warning in *Mediator Dei*. In the traditional *ratio studiorum*, while not neglecting the import of the liturgy as a *locus theologicus*, the courses on liturgy and *exercitatio rubricarum* were considered only minor courses as part of the normal *cursus theologicus* or *cursus seminaristicus*. This changed as a result of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 16, which elevated these courses to principal or major courses.[15] While a deeper study of the liturgy should not be discounted as negative *in se*, it nevertheless needs to be seen in relationship to the larger study of theology, in proper proportion, as a part to the whole.

The liturgical texts as issued in 1962 remain normative and never abrogated, evidenced in a particular way by their *praenotanda* witnessing to a continuity with St. Pius V's *Quo Primum* (in the *Missale*) and *Quod a Nobis* (in the *Breviarium*). Furthermore, the sound doctrine of Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* remains as valid now as ever, specifically that there remains a need to restrain the over-bold and give due moderation to the liturgical movement, be it new or old. The substantial changes in the Roman Rite came as a result of the *Consilium*'s changes between 1964 and 1969. Those which came before it, specifically those issued at the behest of Pope Pius XII, can best be classified as accidental. It is only in this sense that a harmony can be sought between liturgical and doctrinal integrity, and the balance of authority in the Church (in this case, liturgical authority) being used at the service of Tradition.

Footnotes

[1] “*Thesis: S. liturgia (1) non gignit, sed sequitur fidem, (2) eamque exprimit, (3) ideoque est locus theologicus excellens.*” Radó, P. *Enchiridion Liturgicum*. Vol. 1 of 2. Herder: Rome, Freiburg, Barcelona: 1961, p. 14.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Augustine of Hippo, *De dono perseverantiae*, c. 23, PL 45, 1031 s.

[4] Reid, A., “Reflections on authority in liturgy today” in *Catholic World Report*, 14July 2019. [Available online](#) (accessed 8 April 2021).

[5] Radó, op. cit., p. 15.

[6] Schmidt, H. A. P., *Introductio in Liturgiam Occidentalem*. Herder: Rome-Freiburg-im-Breisgau-Barcelona, 1960, pp. 132-133.

[7] McManus, F., “Introduction”, in Reinhold, H.A., *Bringing the Mass to the People*. Baltimore: Helicon, 1960, p. 3.

[8] Radó, op. cit., p. 19.

[9] Dziadosz, H., “New Rubrics Code” in *Catholic Transcript*, 15 December 1960. [Available online](#) (accessed 8 April 2021).

[10] Davies, M., “The Missal of 1962: A Rock of Stability” in *Latin Mass Magazine*, Spring 2001. [Available online](#) (accessed 8 April 2021).

[11] Clore, V., “Re-Echoes 1965” in *Roman Echoes 1965*. Rome: Apud Aedes Pontificii Collegii Americae Septentrionalis, 1965, p. 62. The author notes that concelebration began taking place *ad experimentum* before the end of its *vacatio legis*, and even such novelties as a sung Canon were being introduced before the changes of *Inter Oecumenici* came into force.

[12] *Ordo Divini Officii Recitandi Sacrique Peragendi Secundum Antiquam vel Extraordinariam Ritus Romani Formam*. Romae: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, MMXX, p. 8.

[13] Davies, *ibid*.

[14] *Mediator Dei* 62.

[15] *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 16: “The study of sacred liturgy is to be ranked among the compulsory and major courses in seminaries and religious houses of studies; in theological faculties it is to rank among the principal courses.”