

Extracts on the Breviary Reform of St. Pius X

Notes on the New Rubrics and the Use of the New Psalter

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I. Principal Points of the Reform

With the publication of the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Afflatu*, and of the Rubrics and *Psalterium* that it prescribes, the first stage in the revision of the Breviary has been accomplished. For the past sixty years the desire for a revision has been growing, and has been expressed by numerous provincial councils and individual bishops throughout the world. But the project has never been lost sight of in Rome since the Council of Trent. Benedict XIV and Pius VI made strenuous though fruitless efforts to realise it. Benedict XIV, indeed, appointed a strong committee which he thought would have solved the question. But when its report was presented to him, he found it

so confused, so complicated (*imbrogliati*) and so contradictory that there would be more trouble in correcting it than in correcting the Breviary.

No wonder, then, that between the time of Pius VI and Pius IX very little was attempted. From the days of the latter Pope, however, we may date the commencement of the movement that has resulted in the new legislation. In 1856 a Commission was appointed to answer certain questions as to the necessity and extent of a revision of the Breviary. The Commission agreed that a revision was both necessary and opportune, but was divided as to the matter to which it should be extended. The Fathers of the Vatican Council had the whole question under consideration. The plans before the Council may be gathered under four chief heads:—

- 1) To correct those details in the Lessons which were not in strict accordance with history and sound exegesis.

- 2) To provide for the recitation of the whole Psalter once a week, and to redistribute the psalms in a way that would shorten the Sunday and Ferial Offices.
- 3) To restore the Sundays to their proper place of honour in the Church's year.
- 4) To revise the Calendar and to regulate the translation of festivals.

The Council had not the time to arrive at any decisions. Leo XIII made certain regulations with regard to the matter under the first and fourth headings, and appointed a Commission to consider the whole subject of the first heading. The world has heard nothing of the findings of this Commission; and now, it is said, Pius X has appointed a new Commission in four sections—liturgical, patristic, historical and exegetical—to revise the whole text of the Breviary and Missal and of their rubrics. Some years must elapse before any result can be achieved. In the meantime the new Constitution is designed to regulate the manner and order of reciting the Divine Office; and thus has practically settled three of the main questions that presented themselves to the Vatican Council. It is the first great reform that has been effected since the days of Pius V, and it reverts to the ideas of that Pope while realizing them in a new way. In studying the history of the question, one cannot help being struck by the continuity of the Church's effort to preserve the essential elements of her worship.

1) The chief effect of the new legislation is to secure the recitation of the whole Psalter once a week. This carries us back to the achievement of the first period of the Church's Liturgy. By the time of Pope St. Gregory the Great, the Psalms had been distributed through the seven days of the week, and the rest of the Scriptures through the days of the year. In later periods it came about, through a variety of causes, that the Psalter was neglected, and quite a small

number of psalms was constantly repeated in its place. In consequence, “the piety of those who recited the Office suffered,” as the Canadian Bishops declared at the Vatican Council. Now this remedied. The Psalms, those sacred hymns of praise inspired by the Holy Ghost (“*Divino afflatu compositos psalmos,*”) are restored to a position in which they can once again effectively foster the piety of all who follow the daily recitation of the Divine Office.

The Holy Father, however, has in mind not only the piety of the clergy, but also their efficiency in the pastorate. Hence the *Psalterium* had to be so arranged as not to lay an additional burden on them not to diminish the time that they should devote to the care of souls. It has many times been pointed out, and especially at the Vatican Council, that the Office for Saturday and Sunday, days on which priests engaged in mission work are especially busy, is excessively long. A redistribution of the Psalter through the offices of the week has therefore been contrived with a view to reducing the dominical and ferial office. On the authority of the Pope, the newly arranged Psalter has been issued in a volume of 300 pages, in large type, as the exemplar of the *Psalterium* which must be used from January 1, 1913, by all who recite the Roman Breviary.

This practical shortening of the Psalter for each day is but the complement of the abbreviation which resulted in the formation of the modern Breviary. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a practice grew up of reciting an abbreviated form of the ancient Roman Office. The abridgment was mainly effected in this case by selecting and cutting down the lessons and responds, while leaving the Psalter unchanged. The difficulties due to the length of the several parts of the *Psalterium* were overcome in course of time by the simple device of ignoring the Psalter. Festal Offices were recited whenever possible, and in our time Votive Offices were made optional for nearly all the days to which no feast had been assigned. The task of

abbreviation, however, has at length been faced, and the ancient Roman Office is now reinstated, at least in its essential elements.

2) But if this were all, Pius X's reform would share the fate of Pius V's, and a later Pope Benedict might learn to despair, as did Benedict XIV. For the great difficulty lies in the reconciliation of those two elements, of diverse origin, in the Church's Public Prayer which we may call the *Officium de Tempore* and the *Officium Sanctorum*. It is impossible to go back to the ways of the earlier ages, when both offices might be recited on the same day. It is equally impossible to choose the *Officium de Tempore* while rejecting the *Officium Sanctorum*. To many, indeed, since Raoul de Rivo made his appeal in the fourteenth century of the ancient Roman Office, this has seemed the only way. In fact, Pius V, the great reformer of the Breviary, ordered that not more than eighty-five feasts of saints should be celebrated, and that the rest of the year should be reserved to the *Officium de Tempore*. Yet now one could count on one's fingers the number of days on which the office of the day is not ousted by the office of a saint or a votive office; so hard has it been up to the present to reconcile these two necessary elements in the Church's worship. Liturgists often compare the consequence to a cathedral in which the faithful should abandon the great central nave to offer their worship in the side chapels.

Pius X has found a way of reconciliation other than that of choosing between the two offices. His method resembles the rite of Solemn Vespers on certain feast days at Westminster Cathedral. The main part of the ceremonial is carried out at the High Altar, and during the *Magnificat* the celebrant goes to offer incense in the chapel of the saint whose festival it may be.

So now Pius X has ordered that on saints' days the antiphons and psalms shall be taken from the *Officium de Tempore*, and all from the Little Chapter onwards from the office of the saint.

The strict rule is that the antiphons and psalms of the whole office, together with the versicles of the three nocturns and the lessons of the first nocturn, must be taken from the office of the day, while the rest, including the antiphons of the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, must be from the office of the saint.

Partial precedents for this combination are to be found in the

- Office of *Sancta Maria in Sabbato*,
- the Vespers during the octave of Christmas,
- and especially in the office for feasts of simple rank.

The following feasts or days, however, keep their own office, while taking the psalms of Lauds, the Little Hours and Compline from the Sunday in the new Psalter:

- all feasts of our Lord, our Lady,
- the Angels,
- St. John the Baptist,
- St. Joseph,
- the Apostles,
- doubles of the first and second class,
- the days within all octaves (unless an office of higher rank is to be recited),
- the Vigils of Christmas, Epiphany and Pentecost,
- and the Friday after the octave of the Ascension.

Feasts which have proper antiphons for the psalms also follow the Proper or Common of Saints in Matins, Lauds, and Vespers. The chief difference between the ordinary office on a major double and on a simple or feria is, therefore, the omission of the versicles and lessons of the first two nocturns.

Thus, the result of the combination of the Psalter with the Festal Office is to make the recitation of the Divine Office more varied, more inspiring, yet withal no longer than it has been up to the

present, while at the same time the cultus of the saints suffers no diminution.

3) Another change, which if less radical is no less important, is the restoration of the Sundays to their proper position as the basis of the Church's year. Minor Sundays now only yield to a double of the first or second class, or to a Feast of our Lord and its octave day, and are given full first and second Vespers in preference to feasts of lesser rank than those just named. Thus, is brought about the reform which Benedict XIV most ardently desired. In future the gospel solemnly sung by the deacon in the Mass on Sunday will really be "the gospel appointed for that day," the gospel upon which the homily is to be preached, in accordance with instructions laid down by the present Holy Father.

4) A great simplification of the calendar is brought about by the new laws concerning the translation of festivals. Henceforth only doubles of the first and second class may be transferred, and then to the first week-day following which is less than a double of the second class or is not specially privileged. (Cf. S.C.R., 24 Feb., 1912). Major doubles and lesser feasts are not transferred, but only commemorated. Thus has one more of the plans which were submitted to the Vatican Council been realized.

5) Other important changes are included in the new legislation. Thus, the Office for the Dead has been completed and will in future be the only office recited on the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed. The Titular Feast and the anniversary of the Dedication of the Cathedral are now to be celebrated throughout the diocese as doubles of the first class with an octave, but regulars who have their own calendars do not keep the octaves. Also, a single antiphon and verse, with the one prayer *A Cunctis* take the place of the *Suffragia Sanctorum*, and the Psalms are omitted from the *Preces Feriales*. The privilege of substituting a votive office in place of a ferial office is abolished.

II. The Official Documents

1) The principal documents concerning this far-reaching reform will be found prefixed to the new *Psalterium* and to new editions of the Breviary. They consist of the Bull *Divino Afflatu*, which lays down the motives and principles that have guided the reform, and defines its binding force; the *Rubicæ*, which embody the details of the reform; and, finally, the *Psalterium noviter dispositum*, containing the whole Psalter according to the division and arrangement in which it is to be recited for the future.

More recently the Sacred Congregation of Rites has issued several decrees concerning doubtful points, and a very long Instruction concerning changes to be made in new editions of the Breviary and Missal. In considering the reform of the Calendar, the changes initiated by the *Motu Proprio De Diebus festis* (July 2, 1911) should also be borne in mind.

2) It should be clearly understood that the reform of the Breviary and Missal referred to in the opening paragraph of the first chapter has hardly been taken in hand yet, and that the really new editions cannot appear for several years. The changes to be made in editions that are issued in the meantime are of a strictly limited nature.

If no revision at all were carried out here and now, the condition of affairs, though satisfactory enough from a financial point of view, would have proved very inconvenient. It would have involved a standing contradiction between the general directions prefixed to the books and the rubrics scattered throughout the body of the books, and even between the various parts of the general directions themselves. This state of affairs would not indeed be without its compensations from the point of view of those persons who most ardently desire the speedy realization of the thorough reform of the complete text of Missal and Breviary foreshadowed in the recent

Apostolic Constitution. For, being patent to everybody, it would keep the need of a reform constantly before men's minds.

The Sacred Congregation of Rites, however, has decided on the more practical step of removing many of the contradictions. With this purpose, the detailed instructions referred to above have been issued concerning the changes which must at once be made in the several parts of both Missal and Breviary. These instructions are chiefly designed to bring the rubrics of the Missal and Breviary into conformity with the new legislation imposed by the *Motu Proprio De diebus festis* and the Bull *Divino Afflatu*. They are drawn up on the lines of the *Rubricæ Generales*, issued by Leo XIII in 1897, and make a new edition of Missal and Breviary necessary. But at the same time there is no legislation in the new editions which is not already contained in the above-mentioned documents.

It will be useful to note see of the changes in the new editions.

To take the Breviary first. In the front of the book, after the Bulls of Pius V, Clement VIII and Urban VIII, the Bull (*Divino Afflatu*) of Pius X must be inserted. Then four decrees concerning the Calendar of Feasts are to be omitted, as being out of date.

Changes are made in twenty-three days of the Calendar, most of them due to the *Motu Proprio De diebus festis*. The most noteworthy concern the Feasts of St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph and the Holy Name of Mary, and the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed.

It will be noticed also that octave days of double of the first class are ranked as major doubles instead of as doubles. This is new, though Mgr. Piacenza had already contended for it in his works on the Calendar.

The *Rubricæ Generales*, which follow the *Kalendarium*, remain untouched, but are to be followed by the *Novæ Rubricæ*, which were issued with the *Divino Afflatu*. In place of the section headed *Duae*

Tabellae, which deals with the rank of feasts and the relationship between various feasts and offices, a new document, styled *Tres Tabellae*, is to be inserted. To understand how necessary this change is, one or two examples will suffice.

If one were to refer to the Tables in the present breviary, one would find that when a major double and a double of the second class chance to fall on the same day, the office of the major double should be transferred. But every one knows that, according to the new legislation, the major double should only be commemorated; nor will the new Tables lead him astray.

Again, if one were to refer to the Tables in the present Breviary for the Vespers for a Saturday when the Sunday office was to be recited on the following day, one would find that on all feasts higher than a semi-double the whole Vespers should be from the office of the feast, and that the Sunday should only be commemorated; and further, that even on semi-doubles the Sunday office only appeared at the Little Chapter.

On referring to the new Tables, however, one will find that on any feast lower than a double of the second class the whole Vespers must be from the Sunday, with commemoration of the preceding feast, unless it be a Simple.

All the changes mentioned so far concern what may be called the introductory matter of the Breviary. But in the body of the Breviary itself there are also numerous changes. First, the new Psalter must replace the old one. Next, in the *Proprium de Tempore* and the *Proprium Sanctorum*, many rubrics are added, or entirely rewritten. Also certain new antiphons are to be substituted in Lauds for the Sundays in Lent, in accordance with the *Divino Afflatu*. New lessons are added for the octaves of St. John the Baptist and of St. Joseph, and certain phrases in the old lessons are amended. These changes affect the office for the whole year, and fill eleven pages of the *Acta*

Apostolicae Sedis. The principal changes in the Common of Saints and the rest of the Breviary concern the Common of Martyrs and the office of Our Lady *in sabbato*.