

“This Day Forward”. Andrew Cameron-Mowat SJ. Published by The Tablet, February 24, 2007. Reprinted by permission. [www.thetablet.co.uk](http://www.thetablet.co.uk)

These are interesting times for the Roman Rite. My sense is that the Church is being pushed in a direction that is hostile to the vision of the Second Vatican Council and which lacks a true sense of the Catholic imagination. But who is doing the pushing deserves closer scrutiny.

Like other scholars my theological and liturgical study included appreciation of the wisdom of the great theological scholars of the 20th century, whose insights were to be of such immense value at the Second Vatican Council and afterwards. These were Catholics of titanic significance: de Lubac, Congar, Jungmann, von Balthasar, Chenu, Rahner. I marvelled at the pastoral good sense of liturgical scholars, many of them long-serving priests and religious, whose determination to move the renewal through to fruition would see dramatic change, and, for the vast majority of churchgoers, significant improvement in their participation in the liturgy. The English-speaking world seemed particularly blessed with wise scholars who also happened to be superb teachers and writers: Clifford Howell, James Crichton, Edward Yarnold, Godfrey Diekmann, Fred McManus, Robert Hovda, Aidan Kavanagh, Robert Taft. None of these could even remotely be thought of as revolutionaries; they had studied at great centres of liturgical tradition. They knew the liturgy prior to 1970 inside out and also knew why change was essential.

The renewal of the liturgy had been a long time coming. From as far back as 1903 and perhaps even earlier than that we can trace gradual, organic and theologically appropriate changes. As dogmatic theology on the nature of the Church and of the sacraments developed, so did liturgical theology. The calls for greater involvement by the people in liturgical music and in the Mass that Pope Pius X had proclaimed in 1903 in his *motu proprio* “*inter sollicitudines*” - containing the first official use of the term “active participation” - gave defining impetus to the Liturgical Movement led by such mighty figures as Dom Lambert Beauduin and Fr. Romano Guardini. This was true Catholic liturgical development: alive to the signs of the times, seeking to restore the liturgy to the essentials and also to find ways to promote its power and its mystery. The reformers wanted to bring the wisdom of Catholic

imagination to bear so that the liturgy would be more immediate, more prayerful and a true experience of the incarnate Christ who speaks to people in his Word and becomes one with them in his Sacrament. This sense of the presence of God and the experience of the desire of God to communicate through the risen Christ in all and every aspect of human life was not a new discovery either. It was very much present in the Catholic reformation of the Council of Trent.

None of the major liturgical reformers, nor the great theological minds of the Council, can be held responsible for bad celebrations of the present Roman Rite. There were astonishingly sloppy celebrations of the previous rite as well, including incomprehensible mumbles in a celebration that might last as little as 10 minutes. Neither do I believe that the Mass should be tarred with the brush of the extreme examples that one finds on websites and descriptions of which regularly end up in the in-tray of Cardinal Francis Arinze, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, who seems to base some of his public lectures on reactions to such offensive travesties.

It is vital and enriching for the Catholic community to receive new members from other Christian traditions. Their gifts are of immense value to the whole community. However, there is a danger from the liturgical point of view that occasionally, upon entering a tradition, especially one that is as deep and vibrant as our own, newcomers may misinterpret that tradition, or that certain scholars confuse an articulate intellectualism with being formed by a tradition and experience. The renewal of the Vatican Council is not essentially a break with our liturgical past but preserves a deep Christological and sacramental mysticism and spiritual experience which has been central to the Church's life and thought. That is why, for example, there can be only one Roman Rite within our living tradition. There seems evident to me in publications by certain ordained ministers and others who have joined our tradition a lack of experience that misrepresents the actual liturgical practice which existed before the Council, reconstructing from texts an idealised vision of the Roman Rite. Inevitably, this leads to a failure to appreciate charitably the issues, concerns and problems that the great pastoral liturgists of the period from 1960 onwards faced, considered, and tried to deal with in the liturgical reform.

There have been indications of problems for several years. One example is the demand for a partial version of the “full tradition”, including the Mass and the other sacraments whose old rituals were abrogated (replaced) by Paul VI over 30 years ago. Some from the Anglo-Catholic wing seem to have a particular taste for Gothic: gothic vestments, rood-screens, and a preference against girl altar-servers. There have been some attempted to re-write liturgical history by those who claim that “participatio actuosa” means “real participation” (which it doesn’t, or at least, not in the way they claim it does), that the Mass of Pius V is irreformable by any subsequent Pope (which it isn’t), and many other misrepresentations of history that fit their agendas. I am particularly surprised that such critics make full use of the privilege which John Paul II gave to use the 1962 rite while happily ignoring his stipulation that they not question the doctrinal authority of the 1970 rite. Even the great theological teachers of the Council come in for their re-interpretations.

Then there’s the problem of possible new translations. As Donald Trautman, bishop of Erie, Pennsylvania and chairman of the US bishops’ conference liturgy committee, revealed recently, the translation being prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy emphasises closer correspondence to the Latin original, even at times down to punctuation, and a peculiarly pretentious or technical vocabulary (“deign”, “graciously grant”, “consubstantial”, etc.) Perhaps what the translators are after is an Anglo-Catholic tone to the prayers. This might lead to a version of the Mass that suggests the Book of Common Prayer, while lacking not only the background and training of Cranmer but also crucially, his context. The changes to the texts that the people will proclaim (a draft of which was published by The Tablet in 2004) has caused unrest and confusion, particularly amongst our ecumenical partners, with whom we had a long-standing agreement to pray in common. There is also the fallacy of thinking that an artificially antique language communicates and, moreover, that it communicates transcendence or mystery. It may only communicate artificiality and oddity.

We need to re-assert our commitment to the whole of liturgical history and to the movement for liturgical development in its entirety; we cannot be held hostage by those who claim the agenda is solely about a

particular version of the Roman Rite which Paul VI abrogated over 35 years ago. There is so much to do with future developments of the Roman Rite that we need to move on. There are serious pastoral questions yet to be faced. How do we respond to the call for a deeper understanding of post-colonial liturgy? Do our celebrations have underlying structures which oppress minorities, particularly people of other races, the powerless, the marginalised? In what ways can and should the liturgy respond to those whose hunger for Christ is not presently being met in our present celebrations? How can preaching truly make present Christ as he speaks from the ambo?

The best way to respond to the multi-cultural and pluralistic faith context in Britain today will not be to raise the draw-bridges and to look on contemporary creativity and genius with suspicion. That way speaks more of a sort of Protestant or Barthian imagination than a Catholic one. Creativity and genius are not enemies of tradition but part of it; indeed they are its life-blood because it is in them that the Spirit is truly active.

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