

# PAIX LITURGIQUE

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## The New Rite of Baptism for Children: An Irenic Rite

**First instalment of our comparative study on the extraordinary Ritual and modern practices**

The liturgical reform that followed Vatican II had two characteristics: it was an extremely profound upheaval, which explains the immediate reactions it elicited (see for example that of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as early as 1966); it also transformed the entire system of Catholic worship (Mass, sacraments, blessings) without leaving anything as it had found it (even when some of its elements happened to be from the traditional liturgy, a certain number of Collects for instance, the reformers always made some little change, as if as a matter of principle).

Now although Paix Liturgique's particular interest is in the changes in the new Mass, since its essential project is to make the traditional Mass better known, loved, and defended, it also finds it necessary to contemplate the totality of a reform whose intention was to be total. This is what the faithful who are attached to the traditional Mass ask of Paix Liturgique, since their life as Christians causes them to participate in other ceremonies as well: baptisms, confirmations, funerals, and priestly ordinations. On such occasions they are often deeply troubled. In order to explain things correctly, we thought it might be helpful to provide them with some analysis in this letter and a few to follow.

It

is also worth noting that the provisions of the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* and of its application decree, the *Ecclesia Dei* Commission's instruction *Universæ Ecclesiæ* (30 April 2011), expressly cover not only the Mass but also the rest of the liturgy. The choice of the 1962 Missal as the reference point for the *usus antiquior* means that the same "1962 situation" rule logically applies to other books besides the Missal as well (*Summorum Pontificum* 9; *Universæ Ecclesiæ*, 24, 28). This means that one may use the last typical edition of the Tridentine Breviary of 1961 to say the Divine Office, that of the 1952 Ritual to celebrate the sacraments, that of the 1886 Ceremonial of bishops, and that of the 1961 and 1962 Pontifical for the sacraments given by the bishop. For example *Summorum Pontificum* 5.3 says: "For those faithful or priests who request it, the pastor should allow celebrations in this extraordinary form also in special circumstances such as marriages, funerals or occasional celebrations, e.g. pilgrimages." We must therefore help such requesters to provide a persuasive justification—for themselves and for those around them—when they request traditional sacraments and ceremonies.

For

all of these reasons we have undertaken to examine parts of the new liturgy besides the Mass. Such an examination will demonstrate their material deficiencies and formal weaknesses, the effects of which are pastorally deleterious, especially for the faith of the "users." This judgment is unfortunately confirmed by the widespread disaffection of the faithful regarding the reformed Christian worship in the Churches of Europe (one example: in France today only 30% of children born receive baptism). Our letters will also contribute to explaining this historically unprecedented pastoral failure.

**The new ceremony of baptism for children: an irenic rite**

Our study centers on the baptism of children by comparing the traditional rite and the rite in its new form.<sup>1</sup> In this new form Baptism is a significantly longer ceremony, much of which is taken up with talking; indeed the ceremony includes a Liturgy of the Word with a veritable homily.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, the message it conveys is far weaker on at least one point: the struggle against the devil, which is so characteristic of the traditional form, has practically vanished. This is especially manifest in the disappearance of the exorcisms themselves and of related rites. It is as though those who drafted the new rite of baptism no longer had a very firm belief in the doctrine of original sin. Original sin is reduced to the contamination of souls as they come into the world by an aggregated influence of all past, present, and future faults. The new theologians prefer to speak of “the sin of the world,” for instance Fr. André-Marie Dubarle, OP,<sup>3</sup> or even Fr. Gustave Martelet, SJ, in *Libre réponse à un scandale. La faute originelle, la souffrance et la mort*,<sup>4</sup> Fr. Jean-Michel Maldamé, OP, etc.

### **A Less Sacred Tone**

In the traditional Ritual of Paul V formulas are fixed and ceremonial. Ritualized movements accompany them: exsufflation (the evil spirit is driven out; the Holy Ghost is infused); repeated signs of the cross; the tasting of salt (exorcized and exorcizing salt, salt of wisdom prefiguring the Eucharistic food); two actual exorcisms; imposition of the hand and imposition of the stole (taking over the Child from the demon in the name of Christ); rite of Ephphetha (saliva on the nostrils and ears of the baptized to open the senses to the things of God); obligatory anointing with the oil of the catechumens (oil of salvation, which is in fact another kind of exorcism); passing from the penitential violet stole, used for the entire preparatory ceremony, to the white stole of joy for the baptism itself.

As for the new baptism, it is preceded by a welcoming formula with overtones of a secular meeting: “The celebrant greets all present,

and especially the parents and godparents,” says the Ritual. The French Ritual specifies that if the priest knows them, he may call them by their names.

Here

again the possible variations are quite numerous, with the a-ritual effect already noted above. For instance the preliminary questions are: “What name have you chosen for your child? –N. What do you ask of the Church of God? –Baptism.” But the Ritual adds: “the parents may use other words, such as, ‘faith,’ ‘the grace of Christ,’ ‘entrance into the Church,’ ‘eternal life’.” The readings are a matter of choice, the prayer of intercession (Universal Prayer) is adaptable, the monitions may be adapted by the priest if he deems them unsuited to the assembly. Different blessings of the water are possible: there may be an imposition of the hand or an anointing with the water of the Catechumens, at the priest’s choice. The exorcisms are reduced to one prayer, with two formulas to choose from, each of which has a narrower scope; we shall discuss them shortly.

**The battle against the devil is side-stepped only to welcome the child into the community**

In

the traditional form, baptism is presented as an infusion of divine life in a dynamic of explicit struggle against the devil’s ascendancy resulting from original sin; the new rite barely mentions such a perspective.

In

the Paul V Ritual, the priest dons a violet stole, asks about the request for baptism, recalls the double commandment of love which is the foundation of Christian life, and breathes on the child’s face three times while saying: “Go forth from him (her), unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.” Then he makes the sign of the cross over the child’s forehead and heart. Later in the ceremony, after the

last exorcism and the threefold renunciation of Satan, his works and his pomps, the priest again makes the sign of the cross with the oil of Catechumens, the oil of combat, on the chest and between the shoulders. The following imposition of the hand—a sign of authority that breaks “the snares of Satan which until now have held him (her)” —and the exorcism over the salt follow the same movement leading to the first exorcism.

In the new rite the preparatory ceremonies are shorter. Yet, more even than their short length, it is the meaning attributed to them that is in remarkable contrast to the older Ritual. After the questioning about the request for baptism, the priest, who from the outset has been wearing a white stole (or “in a color that expresses joy”), makes the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead and declares: “N., the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of his cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead, and invite your parents (and godparents) to do the same.” This is immediately followed by an invitation “to take part in the liturgy of the word. If circumstances permit, there is a procession to the place where this will be celebrated.” The procession towards the place of baptism is accompanied by a song, for example the pilgrimage-themed psalm *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua* (84 [Vulgate 83]: 7, 8, 9ab).

The impression given is that the person yet to be baptized walks right into the Church and that joy is the appropriate response immediately, as though the mark of Satan on the soul of the baptized person as well as his power over it were insignificant. This is in clear contrast to the dramatic tone characteristic of the entire first part of the celebration in the traditional Ritual, though it too does acknowledge from the very beginning the joy of a new life entered upon through baptism. An example of this is to be found in the prayer before the imposition of salt: “Seasoned by the salt which is symbolic of Thy wisdom, may he (she) be relieved of the corruption of evil desires; and, finding pleasure in the keeping of Thy commandments, may he (she) joyfully serve Thee in Thy Church.”

**In the end the difference between the two rites is concentrated in the exorcisms. This difference is considerable:**

In the traditional Ritual the two actual exorcisms are particularly explicit: “I cast you out, unclean spirit, in the name of the Father, † and of the Son, † and of the Holy † Spirit. Depart and stay far away from this servant (these servants) of God, N. (N. and N.). For it is the Lord Himself who commands you, accursed and doomed spirit, He who walked on the sea and reached out His hand to Peter as he was sinking. So then, foul fiend, recall the curse that decided your fate once for all. Indeed, pay homage to the living and true God, pay homage to Jesus Christ, His Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Keep far from this servant (these servants) of God . . . .” This exorcism ends with the sign of the cross: “Never dare, accursed fiend, to desecrate this seal of the holy † cross which we imprint upon his (her) brow.” Then the second exorcism: “I cast you out, every unclean spirit, in the name of God † the Father almighty, in the name of Jesus † Christ, His Son, our Lord and judge, and in the power of the Holy † Spirit. Be gone, Satan, from God's handiwork . . . .”

In the new rite, these are replaced by a prayer that comes just before the celebration of the sacrament. It is not an actual exorcism through which the minister of Christ, in His name, commands Satan to withdraw; rather it is a prayer in which God is simply asked to “to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness”:

o 1st formula: “Almighty and ever-living God, you sent your only Son into the world to cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil, to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness, and bring him into the splendor of your kingdom of light. We pray for this child: set him (her) free from original sin, make him (her) a temple of your glory, and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him (her).”

o 2nd formula: “Almighty God, you sent your only Son to rescue us from slavery of sin, and to give us the freedom only your sons and daughters enjoy. We now pray for this child who will have to face the world with its temptations, and fight the devil in all his cunning. Your Son died and rose again to save us. By his victory over sin and death, cleanse this child from the stain of original sin.

Strengthen him (her) with the grace of Christ, and watch over him (her) at every step in life's journey.”

To

be sure, just as at Mass the Consecration alone contains the reality of the sacrifice, which such prayers as the Offertory of the traditional Mass only make more explicit, so too in Baptism the infusion of water accompanied by the baptismal words contains the entire sign of the sacrament, including the putting to flight of the devil that the exorcisms of the traditional Ritual merely make explicit. Nevertheless, the blurring of this explicitness cannot but have an effect on the faith of the faithful.

... And not only on their faith. Fr. Jean-Régis Fropo, priest of the diocese of Fréjus-Toulon 2005-2014, pointed out to Church authorities both Roman and French the deficiencies involved in the struggle against the devil in the May 15, 1969 rite. According to him, a certain number of cases of diabolical possession among children or those baptized as adults might be explained by this rite's deficiencies in the area of exorcism.<sup>5</sup> In any event, reasons comparable to those that make the traditional Mass preferable, namely insufficiencies in the doctrinal expression of the new liturgy, lead many parents with children to baptize to opt for the traditional form. To do so has been their officially recognized right since 2007.

1. Ordo baptismi parvulorum, Rite of Baptism for Children (first typical edition 1969, second 1973).

2. The New Rite of Baptism For Children, ICEL  
(Hales Corner, WI: Priests of the Sacred Heart, 1969).

3. Le péché originel dans  
l'Écriture (Paris: Cerf, 1958).

4. Cerf, 1986.

5. L'Homme  
nouveau blog, <https://www.hommenouveau.fr/1815/religion/nouveau-rituel-du-bapteme---le-cri-d-alar-me-d-un-exorciste.htm>