

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 55 published 16 January 2015

WELCOME CARDINAL SARAH, POPE FRANCIS'S NEW “MINISTER OF LITURGY”!

After giving it a lot of thought, Pope Francis finally nominated Cardinal Robert Sarah, age 69, to succeed to cardinal Cañizares as head of the Congregation for Divine Worship. Cardinal Sarah, formerly archbishop of Conakry in Guinea, is one of the most eminent personages of the College of Cardinals. As a priest he was highly esteemed by John Paul II, who named him bishop at the young age of 34. Until now he had been President of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum.

Always glad to accept the invitations he receives, especially when it is to preach priestly retreats, Cardinal Sarah made a strong impression in 2011 with a homily given during priestly ordinations for the Communauté Saint-Martin, a French community founded with the blessing of Cardinal Siri and which celebrates the Novus Ordo according to the General Instructions of the Roman Missal. He said: *“There are no moral references anymore. The distinction between good and evil has been lost The serious aspect here isn't so much being wrong: it's turning error into a rule of life If we're afraid to proclaim the truth of the Gospel, if we're ashamed of denouncing serious deviations in the moral realm, if we seek to adapt to this world of loosening morals and religious and ethical relativism, if we're afraid to strongly denounce abominable laws on the new worldwide ethic, on marriage, the family in all its forms, abortion, laws that are completely opposed to the laws of nature and of God and which Western cultures promote and impose through mass media and their economic power, then Ezechiel's prophetic words will fall upon us as a grave divine reproach.”*

By way of greeting the cardinal's arrival, we have asked a few personalities who are well known for their attachment to a greater dignity and solemnity in Catholic liturgy to react to his nomination. These are: Bishop Athanasius Schneider, auxiliary bishop of Saint Mary of Astana and advocate for the return to the traditional way of receiving Communion kneeling and on the tongue; Don Nicola Bux, great popularizer of the “Reform of the reform” wished by Benedict XVI; Joseph Shaw, President of the Latin Mass Society of England and Wales, professor at Oxford, and father of six; Giuseppe Capoccia, delegate general of Coetus Internationalis Summorum Pontificum and organizer of the Summorum Pontificum pilgrimage in Rome.

Image: rs20141218111138_sarah2.jpg

The day before his election, cardinal Sarah attended the presentation by cardinal Burke of the Sacra Liturgy proceedings in Rome.

I - Bishop Schneider's reaction

Bishop Schneider was kind enough to give us his answer from Brazil, where he was being presented with the Portuguese edition of Corpus Christi, his book on “Communion in the hand at the heart of the Church crisis.”

“Cardinal Sarah visited Kazakhstan twice. During these visits I had the opportunity of spending time with him as his Russian interpreter. I saw a man of God with a great interior life, a simple and honorable man of true humility. His sermons and words combined conceptual clarity, doctrinal precision, and spiritual depth. I was personally edified by the example the cardinal set.

I hope that Cardinal Sarah [as head of the Congregation for Divine Worship] will be able to make an efficacious contribution to the true renewal of the Church's liturgical life according to Saint John Paul II's motto: Duc in altum! In other words, may he bring liturgical practice to heights of sacrality!”

+Athanasius Schneider, Auxiliary Bishop of Saint Mary of Astana.

II - Don Nicola Bux's reaction

"A man who prays is a man par excellence. Worship is the greatest act we could ever accomplish because it connects us to our origin, to Him who is Man's creator and saviour. Nowadays Catholic worship is suffering from an imbalance between its communal form, which increased disproportionately after the Council, and its personal form, itself reduced to nothing by precisely this communal excess which stifles all pious participation. This is one of the problems that Cardinal Sarah will have to deal with in his role as Prefect of Divine worship

The purpose and mission of worship is to put man in the presence of God: to allow him to meet God in an encounter that is no longer obvious in our age, which is characterized by dechristianization. Peter's reaction, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man," is a good indication of how God's presence is at the same time close to us yet beyond us. The liturgy is sacred because it puts us in God's presence. But, as Benedict XVI has written, this sacred dimension seems to have vanished and to have given way to a show-liturgy—"liturtainment" as it is called in the United States—that pushes many of the faithful, young people in particular, to turn to the majesty of the Byzantine rite or to the sobriety of the traditional Roman rite there to recover the sense of the sacred. Many bishops are taking stock of this phenomenon, which points up a generational change and feeds into a new liturgical movement that the Congregation for Divine Worship must, and will always increasingly have to, take into account."

Don Nicola Bux, Consultor for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

III - Joseph Shaw's reaction (Latin Mass Society)

"Under Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, the Congregation issued a series of condemnations of some liturgical abuses, while simultaneously conceding defeat on others, such as the reception of Holy Communion in the hand, Communion under both kinds at large, Sunday celebrations, and female Altar servers. The supporters of liturgical propriety had the impossible task of defending a series of rules which were almost universally flouted, knowing that the Congregation could itself abandon them at any moment.

Under Pope Benedict a new phenomenon arose: a generation of priests and bishops, often inspired by the Traditional Latin Mass, who wished not only to combat abuses but thoroughly to re-sacralise the liturgy. This popular movement often found itself at the limits of what was allowed under the rules of the Ordinary Form. For example, a favourite aspiration, encouraged by Cardinal Ratzinger in The Spirit of the Liturgy, was the restoration of the traditional silent Canon, not permitted in the Ordinary Form.

With the advent of Pope Francis the re-sacralisers have not gone away, and the case for increasing the sense of the sacred in the Ordinary Form, as for increasing the availability of the Extraordinary Form, is difficult to dispute. Cardinal Sarah is left with the problem of how to foster and guide this project, without igniting a civil war in parishes over the liturgy."

Joseph Shaw, Chairman, The Latin Mass Society

IV - Giuseppe Capoccia's reaction (Coetus Internationalis Summorum Pontificum)

Contrary to what many media reported (including Vatican Insider, the world's number one vaticanista site), the meeting between Cardinal Sarah and the priests of the most recent Summorum Pontificum pilgrimage did not take place. Nevertheless we went ahead and asked Giuseppe Capoccia, pilgrimage delegate general, what had prompted the CISP to contact him.

"Unfortunately I do not know Cardinal Sarah. At least not yet since, from now on, I shall certainly have an opportunity to present our activities to him and to

ask for his blessing. I had hoped to allow the priests and seminarians on our pilgrimage to meet him for two reasons: in the first place because he headed Cor Unum, the organism that manages the Holy Father's international charities and which, as such, is on the front lines in assisting the Catholic communities undergoing martyrdom in the Near East; secondly because we knew him to be a man of deep faith who is convinced that the best guarantee of the unity of the Church is the intimate union of each Catholic with God. Now this intimate union with God is nourished by private prayer, but also by the public prayer of the faithful, in both forms of the Roman rite. In this sense, we are obliged to the Pope for this nomination, which ought to allow us to continue further on the path of peace and reconciliation prepared under John Paul II, delineated under Benedict XVI, and confirmed today with Cardinal Sarah."

Giuseppe Capoccia, General Delegate, CISP

V - The reflections of Paix liturgique

1) Francis, the first Pope whose entire priestly and liturgical life has been spent within the norms of the reformed liturgy, has neither his predecessors' culture nor their sensitivity (especially not Benedict XVI's) when it comes to the celebration of divine worship. There was therefore much anticipation among both conservatives and moderns about the nomination of Cardinal Cañizares's successor as the pope's "Minister of Liturgy." The Holy Father chose peace, continuity, and competence: peace and continuity because Cardinal Sarah was the successor that Cardinal Cañizares had wanted; competence because the new Prefect of Worship is deeply imbued with the Eucharistic Mystery, as the sermon quoted above (delivered before the Communauté Saint-Martin) indicates.

2) It is also noteworthy that another African cardinal, the Nigerian Cardinal Arinze, used already to be Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship (succeeding to Cardinal Medina and preceding Cardinal Cañizares). He too was known to be a partisan not of any Reform of the Reform, but of a worthy celebration of the reformed liturgy and of its harmonious cohabitation with the extraordinary form. He especially attached great importance to the quality of vernacular translations and initiated the revision of most liturgical translations in greater conformity to tradition and dogma.

3) "You will be a great African bishop, like Saint Augustine, if you remain a man of God, a mystic, and a friend of God's, one who always stands before God in an attitude of filial love, of adoration, of contemplation, of face to face encounter, like Moses. What is a bishop but a friend of God's? His heart is completely united to God's heart. His being, his life, his work, his projects have meaning and substance only in God. He lives for God, by God, and in God. The bishop is truly God's friend. He must lead the Christian people along temporal paths in its pilgrimage to eternity. He must lead all souls of good will to experience God and to live fully and intensely a genuine friendship with Him." These lines from **a homily** the cardinal delivered while Secretary of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith during the episcopal consecration of a Cameroonian bishop in 2008 perfectly illustrate the judgment that all who know him, including Bishop Schneider, have on Cardinal Sarah. It's a safe bet that the cardinal's spiritual depth and clarity of expression will be important assets in the face of the challenges that Don Nicola Bux and Joseph Shaw point out in their commentaries. Indeed, ever since the conciliar reform, the prefects of Divine Worship have been able to defend the sanctity of Catholic liturgy more by their own example than by their dicastery's authority.

4) According to some of the reports we have been able to gather on Cardinal Sarah, a single major influence seems to characterize the cardinal's spirituality: Benedictine life. When he was bishop of Conakry, Bishop Sarah had granted the foundation of the abbey of the Holy Cross of Friguigbé, daughter house to Sainte-Marie-de-Maumont (France), and had undertaken the foundation of a daughter house of Keur-Moussa (Senegal), namely Saint Joseph of Séguéya. The cardinal is well known for his affinity with Solesmes and is a Gregorian chant connoisseur—there again, a welcome trait in a Prefect of Divine Worship.

5) Let us therefore pray that Cardinal Sarah, an attentive and balanced man, may allow us to "go further on the path of peace and reconciliation," as Giuseppe Capoccia wished.

Image: rs20141218111958_sarahportrait.jpg