

PAIX LITURGIQUE

Letter 79 published 17 January 2017

THE ROMAN MISSAL: FROM ITS ORIGINS TO SUMMORUM PONTIFICUM

Father Claude Barthe is a French diocesan priest ordained in the late 1970s by Archbishop Lefebvre at Écône; today he is the chaplain of the *Coetus Internationalis Summorum Pontificum*. He has written many articles and books on the liturgy (*La messe une forêt de symboles*, Paris: Via Romana, 2011) as well as on theological questions (*Penser l'œcuménisme autrement*, Paris: Via Romana, 2014), and has just published the most complete and detailed handbook possible on the history of the Roman Missal which, in the French-speaking world at least, lacked a recent study. Thanks to its up-to-date bibliography and documentation, this book will be especially useful to seminarians and students, but also generally to priests and laymen who wish to have an adequate knowledge of the history of the holy Mass.

Image: rs20170113210036_misselgrosplan.jpg

At the heart of Fr. Barthe's book is the liturgical work accomplished by the council of Trent and by the popes since then insofar as this work represents the *canonization* of the Roman rite as it had definitively reached a point of stability in the Middle Ages. The author focusses on the period that followed this *canonization* and provides an overview from Saint Pius V to Saint John XXIII: four centuries of the liturgy from the 1570 Bull *Quo primum* to the last typical edition of the Tridentine Missal in 1962.

Fr. Barthe first deals with the history of the Roman Missal from its origins by analyzing: the relationship between Christian worship and its fraternal twin, Synagogue worship; the birth of the Roman Canon; the Romano-Frankish enrichment; the spread of the Roman Curia's Missal as the pope used it in Avignon or at San Lorenzo in Palatio. He further reminds the reader that the Roman Missal as we know and use it today was stabilized as a whole in the eleventh century.

In the last part of the book the author focusses on the surprising post-Vatican II survival of the Tridentine Missal, which was at last fully recognized by the Roman authorities with the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*. He notes that the history of the Tridentine Missal is far from over, especially since it represents now more than ever a guarantee of the transmission of the *lex orandi* in all its richness and without blemish. In this sense, this study is also a sort of history for the future.

In a providential sign this book, *Histoire du missel tridentin et de ses origines*, meaning "A History of the Tridentine Missal and of its Origins," was launched in French bookstores on Thursday 27 October 2016 at the precise moment when Fr. Barthe kicked off the fifth *Populus Summorum Pontificum* international pilgrimage in Rome led by Archbishop Sample in hectic circumstances. In this early year 2017, a year in which we shall be celebrating ten years of the "liberation" of the Tridentine Missal by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007, we are glad to present this review of Fr. Barthe's new work and we hope that it may also be widely distributed in the English-speaking world.

As its title indicates, this book studies its subject in three distinct parts. Starting from the sometimes parallel development of the liturgy of the Church and that of the Synagogue, the first part (about 100 pages) examines the origins of the new worship as fulfilment of the older one, of the sacramentaries, Missals, and *ordines*, as well as of the venerable Roman Canon itself, without passing over the abundant allegorical commentaries the author is so fond of: "This spiritual commentary of the liturgy begins in the New Testament itself. It has been used for the book of the Apocalypse, which specifies that the seven lamps are the seven spirits of God, that the golden vials full of odours represent the prayer of the saints, that the fine linen in which the Spouse is clothed signifies the virtue of the saints" (p. 99).

Roughly equal in length the second part—which at times goes beyond the Missal for considerations of musical and architectural trends, the Eucharistic fast, and the disappearance of Sunday Vespers—tracks in detail the history of the Missal from that "which the Curia inherited in the eleventh century" down to the typical

edition published a few months before the opening of Vatican II. Regarding these last editions: “It is surprising for these publications to have come out, especially the Missal, to the extent that a commission was already actively at work on the draft of the conciliar text on the liturgy, which heralded a profound reform. Perhaps the two succeeding prefects of the Congregation of Rites who oversaw these publications in 1960-1962 . . . wished to draw up a witness-bearing milestone. Besides, it was the logical thing to do: to gather up all the work accomplished by Pius XII’s commission to reach a clearer codification” (p. 201).

The book’s last, and by far the shortest, part (which may provide a key to the allegorical illustration that adorns the cover: the celebration of a Solemn Mass in the ruins of the cathedral of Münster in 1946) deals with *Summorum Pontificum* and the very curious situation in which we live, where “this legislation is much more about adapting to an existing situation, i.e. formalizing and streamlining it rationally, than about determining it. Indeed the Tridentine missal, because it was restituted despite if not in opposition to a liturgical reform that was intended to replace it, thereby finds itself in a sort of self-governing situation It is a rather interesting instance, to the benefit of the pre-conciliar liturgy, of the famous ‘inversion of the hierarchical pyramid’ famously so dear to Yves Congar” (p. 220).

Today a growing proportion of Catholics recognize that the liturgy, like life itself, is transmitted and received rather than invented *ex nihilo* by each successive generation. It follows that many liturgical questions beckon not only literal and allegorical answers, but also historical answers, especially when such an historical answer consists in indicating both the period or author of each innovation (whether or not posterity retained it) and also the circumstances surrounding its introduction. This history manual, written in a readable style that encourages a nearly allegorical reflection on its subject, comes complete with ample footnotes allowing one to pursue such a meditation, and is a witness to its author’s expertise in the field as well as to his manifest love for the holy Mass.

(origin: ceremoniaire.net)