PAIX LITURGIQUE

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The New Ordinations: An Impoverished Rite

Third instalment
of our comparative study of the extraordinary and modern Rituals.

Fifteen to twenty
percent of secular priests are ordained in the traditional rite in France.[1]
These candidates to the priesthood are those who have chosen the Mass they will celebrate throughout their ministry, and their ordination, whether it takes place in a traditional institute or in certain dioceses, reflects this assignation. Hence they choose to receive holy orders in the liturgical universe to which their Mass will belong; such a choice is theologically and spiritually coherent. It must be said that the ordinary form of the rite of ordination, when compared with the traditional one, has been considerably impoverished. This makes sense, to the extent that, as St. Thomas taught, the priesthood is oriented towards the Mass as towards its end: “Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God and to celebrate Mass for the living as well as for the dead,” says the bishop to the man he has just ordained a priest by giving him a chalice and a paten containing bread and wine. To a Mass that has been ritually and theologically impoverished—especially when it comes to expressing the eucharistic sacrifice—had to correspond an ordination rite that has been impoverished in its signification. Study group 20 of the Commission for the implementation of the Constitution on the Holy Liturgy was put in charge of the sacrament of orders. New books were published: for the ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops, in 1968; for the institution to ministries (which replaced the subdiaconate and minor orders) and admission to the diaconate and priesthood, in 1972.[2]

Change for the sake of change?

Much research and many discussions dealt with the sacramental *forms*, i.e. the words that serve to confer the sacrament, joined to the sacramental *matter*, i.e. the gestures accomplished for the same purpose. It is hard to see how the question of modifying these forms could have arisen, particularly since, in a relatively recent document (the 30 November 1947 Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum ordinis*) Pius XII had definitively settled ancient theological discussions by determining what gesture (the laying on of hands) and what words within the consecratory prefaces of episcopal, priestly, and diaconal ordinations conferred the sacrament.

Yet everything in the Roman liturgy had to be modified. On the one hand, the forms of ordination for deacons and priests were left practically untouched. On the other hand, in the case of bishops, Paul VI (18 June 1968 Apostolic Constitution *Pontificalis romani*) set aside the wording designated by Pius XII as the form ("Fill up in Thy priest the perfection of Thy ministry and sanctify with the dew of Thy heavenly ointment this Thy servant decked out with the ornaments of all beauty") and put in its place another formula drawn from Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition*: "So now pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by Him to the holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place to be your temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name." The new Latin consecration of bishops is now closer to that of the Patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria. Is it any more explicit? No. Is it less so? No again. But it has changed, which is progress indeed when one is reforming...

The impoverishment of symbolism in the ordination of priests.

In fact, the whole rite of ordination has been thoroughly impoverished. We shall here limit ourselves to the changes and omissions in the rite of priestly ordination. The principal criticism that the reformers levelled against the traditional ritual was that it was "overloaded." Sulpician priest Pierre Jounel, a highly active reformer and professor at the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, mentioned this in his contribution to the well-known manual 1960s liturgy manual, *The Church At Prayer*;[3] there he stated that medieval liturgist Durandus of Mende, whose Pontifical served as the basis for the Roman Church's Pontifical, had introduced a profusion of gestures and words characterized by an "artificial symbolism." A symbol-reducing diet, therefore, was in order:[4]

- In the traditional ordination the stole is conferred by crossing it over the priest's chest to show that he is bound by obedience to the bishop. The following words accompany it: "Take the yoke of the Lord, for His yoke is sweet and His burden light." The chasuble, which is folded and pinned at the back, is invested with the following words: "Take the vestment of priesthood which signifies charity; for God is able to advance you in charity and in perfection." At the end of the Mass the chasuble is unfolded after a second laying on of hands (the first one occurs when the sacrament is conferred) performed with the following words: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained," all of which signifies the fullness of the priestly powers being conferred.

    - In the new ritual the entirety of this rite is left out: other priests help the new priest put on an uncrossed stole and the chasuble is unfolded without any particular words said.

- In the traditional ordination the priest's hands are anointed during the *Veni Creator* chant with the oil of catechumens, to distinguish this rite from the consecration of bishops, whereas in the new rite this is done with holy chrism, the traditional oil for the consecration of bishops.

- The "porrection" (presentation) to the priest of a chalice containing wine mixed with water and a paten with a host upon it is accompanied by particularly explicit words in the traditional ordination: "Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God, and to celebrate Masses for the living and the dead, in the name of the Lord."

- This formula is so significant that many theologians have considered it to be the actual form of priestly ordination5—until Pius XII's apostolic constitution indicating the form consisted in the formula "Almighty Father, we pray that you bestow on these servants of yours the dignity of the priesthood . . . ."

- The new rite has watered down the formula of porrection to a minimum. The bishop now only says: "Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate." [The newer translation has: "Receive the oblation of the holy people, to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate"]. The excessively medieval expression "power to offer sacrifice to God, and to celebrate Masses for the living and the dead" has been censored.

The secularization of holy orders "in accordance . . . with the contemporary outlook" (Paul VI)

Arguably the most revolutionary document of the liturgical reform was Paul VI's 15 August 1972 motu proprio *Ministeria quædam*. The series of minor orders (porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte) and major orders (subdeacon, deacon, priest) is as ancient as the Latin liturgy in Rome, since a letter of Pope Cornelius in 251 mentions priests, deacons, subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, lectors, and porters, which list is also found in the Good Friday prayer from the fifth century on. With a single stroke of the pen Paul VI abolished five of the six traditional orders leading to priestly ordination (the four minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte, and the first major order, that of subdeacon), as also tonsure, which preceded them all and was the juridical entry into the clerical state.`

All that survived was the major order of the diaconate, by which a man now enters the clergy, and the two instituted ministries of lector and acolyte, which are no longer clerical ordinations but simple mandates given to laymen preparing for the priesthood (or not): "It is in accordance with the reality itself and with the contemporary outlook that the above-mentioned ministries should no longer be called minor orders; their conferral will not be called *ordination*, but *institution*. Only those who have received the diaconate, however, will be clerics in the true sense and will be so regarded. This arrangement will bring out more clearly the distinction between clergy and laity, between what is proper and reserved to

the clergy and what can be entrusted to the laity" (*Ministeria quædam* 17). In this case the tribute paid to "the contemporary outlook" was particularly high: the disappearance of the subdiaconate!

The new Code of Canon Law incorporated this reduction of the clerical state:[6] one no longer enters the clergy through tonsure, from which one then used do climb all the orders leading to the priesthood; one enters it through the diaconate. Yet that hierarchical ladder on which candidates to the priesthood gradually rose towards the priesthood powerfully contributed to expressing the holiness of the priesthood—and in fact it still does for those who climb it today. Lastly it is worth noting that this produces a characteristic inversion in the case of Mass servers. In the traditional Mass they can be laymen, but for the duration of the celebration they are assimilated to tonsured clergy. On the other hand, since the door to the clerical state is now only the diaconate, in the new Mass the ministers of the altar clearly remain laymen, which contributes to the secularization of the celebration. The diverse liturgical functions at Mass (readings, universal prayer intentions, leading the congregation's song, instructions and commentary, distribution of communion) are performed by laymen *qua* laymen, who remain laymen. This is confirmed by the fact that they may be men or women, the latter—to date—not being able to enter the clerical state.

Men and women: regarding service at the altar, which is more visibly close to the priestly ministry, the 5 September 1970 instruction *Liturgicæ instaurationes* 7[7] and the 3 April 1980 instruction *Inæstimabile donum* 18 had repeated the prohibition against delegating it to women. Nevertheless, the practice of having altar girls gradually expanded. Consequently a response from the Congregation for Divine Worship, sent as a letter dated 15 March 1994 to the presidents of episcopal conferences, specified that the principle remained the same and recalled that "this has led to a reassuring development of priestly vocations," but that it was up to the individual bishop, if he deemed it appropriate, to authorize altar girls. In keeping with the usual process since the Council, an "abuse" was granted official permission.

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The deficiencies of the new rite of ordination are such that some diocesan seminarians have considered secretly receiving the orders that the reform had suppressed, i.e. minor orders and subdiaconate, before their priestly ordination in the new form. Strictly speaking, from a juridical point of view, since the motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* there is even nothing to prevent a candidate to the priesthood from asking to receive it according to the traditional Ordo. Except that, *de facto*, he would certainly be held back or even denied ordination

by his superiors. In any case it certainly happens, in France and elsewhere, that young priests ordained according to the new Ordo wish to celebrate their first Mass in the traditional form. Indeed, interest in the traditional form is making significant gains in diocesan seminaries. Did not the seminarians for the diocese of Paris, this year, 2018, ask for a Tridentine rite study session? The slow but steady growth of the traditional Mass ought logically to involve that of traditional ordinations. Both logically, that is, and theologically for, as Saint Thomas taught, "the sacrament of Order is directed to the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of sacraments" (*Summa Theologica*, Supplement, q. 37, art.2).[8]

1.
For 2017: 22 ordinations for the traditional Mass; 84 for the new Mass.

2. *De ordinatione diaconi, presbyteri et episcopi* (1st typical edition, 1968; 2nd typical edition, 1990); *De institutione lectorum et acolythorum,* Institutions to the Ministries (typical edition, 1972).

3.
P. Jounel, "Ordinations," in *The Church At Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*, vol. 3, *The Sacraments*, ed. A.-G. Martimort, trans. M. J. O'Connell, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988): 171-172.

4.
"Ordination of a Priest," in *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI*, trans. ICEL, vol. 2 (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1980): 60-69.

5 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement, q. 37, art. 5.

6.
Canon 266 § 1.

7.
"In conformity with norms traditional in the Church, women (single, married, religious), whether in churches, homes, convents, schools, or institutions for

women, are barred from serving the priest at the altar. According to the norms established for these matters, however, women are allowed to: a. proclaim the readings . . . .”

8.
The *Supplement* to the *Summa*, which was written after St. Thomas’s death, is a posthumous compilation composed by his secretary, Brother Reginald.