

# THE CATHOLIC HERALD

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## **The Organic Development of the Liturgy**

By Alcuin Reid OSB

Saint Michael's Abbey Press £20.95

*Reviewed by Jeremy de Satgé*

I recall an old joke that goes "What is the difference between a liturgist and a prison?"; Answer: "There is always the possibility of escaping prison!".

Whenever liturgy is discussed, many people become very excited and agitated and frequently boring. The 34 years since Pope Paul's VI 1970 Novus Ordo Missal, following the reforms to the Mass in the wake of Vatican II, have been damaging ones for the Church's unity and have even resulted in a schism. Many have refused to acknowledge the new liturgy (and indeed anything that stemmed from the Second Vatican Council) whilst others would like further reforms to include more "inclusive" language and further relaxing of the few rubrics that remain.

*The Organic Development of the Liturgy* by Farnborough Abbey's Dom Alcuin Reid OSB, is a useful, timely and impressive volume, which sets an historical framework to a Roman liturgy that has developed over the two millennia of Christianity. The principle that development of the liturgy is "organic" is shown from the early centuries, such development "combining profound respect for the received liturgical tradition with the openness to necessary development". Those who believe that the Mass of St Pius V is the "Mass for all time" should read carefully!

Indeed, the idea that there should be one universal rite (Roman) only developed once missals were printed in the 15th Century; and even when uniformity was introduced, it simultaneously respected authentic local diversity and the bishops were allowed to exercise "legitimate independence in liturgical matters". Pius V's "Tridentine Rite" (1570) was the first attempt to have a uniform liturgy throughout the world, although he allowed local churches "in which the practice of saying Mass differently was granted over 200 years ago" to continue with their customs. Pius V's Bull, introducing the new revisions to the Missal and Breviary, *Quo Primum*, is foolhardy in that it attempts to end all further development of the Mass. [Popes should always be careful when attempting to declare anything other than matters of doctrine or dogma as being unchangeable - the present Holy Father included!]

Returning to the book: the first chapter, which is all too brief, outlines the liturgical development of the first 19 centuries of Christianity. This makes fascinating reading and I would have liked more of this. It would seem that liturgical changes were frequently controversial. Pope Urban VIII's (1623-1644) attempt to reform the text of certain hymns from the breviary "to give satisfaction to the taste of his time" seemed to have met with general disapproval, his alterations "deforming the works of Christian antiquity". People have long memories: it wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that his reforms were finally reversed!

The rest of the book looks in depth at the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the liturgical movement that led to the Second Vatican Council. This is divided into 2 chapters, the first starting with Pius X and ending with Pius XII's encyclical on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, the forerunner of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Reid states that the early movement for liturgical reform "sought to return liturgical piety to its rightful place in the life of the Church". Only later

“would questions of appropriate reform arise. Pius X was keen to restore and improve ecclesiastical music and generally encourage more active participation by the faithful.

The longest chapter deals in even greater depth with the shortest period of time covered by the book, 1948-1962, as the movement for liturgical reform gathered momentum. Many leading theologians are discussed - sadly too many for this review. Josef Andreas Jungmann SJ, for example, produced in his book *Missarium Sollemnia*, an “exhaustive discussion of the historical evolution of every sing feature of the Mass as we know it today”. Significantly, Jungmann told the German liturgical commission in 1949 that because of a lack of available historical sources “Pius V’s reform was only half a reform”. His argument showed that *Quo Primum* should largely be ignored.

Interestingly, the use of the vernacular had been increasingly permitted by the Holy See from as early as 1920. In the 1950s several countries obtained permission to have the scripture readings in the vernacular. England and Wales were behind several European countries and the USA in obtaining permission as late as 1959.

Although I like Reid’s definition of Organic Development as “holding openness to growth (prompted by pastoral needs) and continuity with tradition in due proportion” and his constant reference to it as he examines specific reforms throughout history, I feel that it not an exact science as such judgements are still open to preference and personal taste. For anybody interested in liturgy, I would highly recommend this book. Although it reads rather as a doctrinal thesis (which is what I suspect is it) and occasionally the footnotes take up more page space than the text, the style of writing is highly readable. There is also a hugely useful and comprehensive bibliography that should keep many a liturgist awake until the early hours.

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