

Tridentine Community News

October 8, 2006

Book Review:

The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background *by Msgr. Klaus Gamber*

As one's interest in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church grows, one becomes aware of two trends: 1) The Traditional/Tridentine Mass movement, and 2) The Reform of the Reform concept. People attracted to the former appreciate the Tridentine rite's rich symbolism, certainty and consistency of manner of celebration, and long history in the Church. Those who lean towards the latter view believe that some updating was due for the Mass, for example having the readings done only in the vernacular. However, they believe that today's typical experience of the Mass lacks the solemnity, reverence, and sacred character of the pre-Vatican II rite, therefore further change is in order.

Rome supports both viewpoints. The papal letter *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta* launched a renewed growth of Traditional Mass communities and priestly orders. Today, the Vatican's *Ecclesia Dei* Commission continues to support Tridentine Mass communities and religious orders, within the framework permitted by current papal legislation.

A variety of Vatican documents and less formal speeches lend support to the Reform of the Reform movement, at least to its call for proper celebration of the *Novus Ordo*, if not for wholesale changes to it. For instance, the 2004 document *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, issued at the direction of Pope John Paul II, reminds the faithful and especially clergy, that rubrics for celebrating the *Novus Ordo* Mass must be followed, and that the environment for Holy Mass must reflect the sacred. On Saturday, September 30, 2006, Francis Cardinal Arinze delivered a speech here in suburban Detroit primarily concerning the proper celebration of Mass. Over and over, he stated that no one, "not even someone with a doctorate from the Catholic University of America", can change one word of the Mass on his own initiative.

Roman Catholic Books (www.booksforcatholics.com) has recently reprinted a book which provides context and academic justification for both of the above viewpoints. The late Msgr. Klaus Gamber's analysis of the post-Vatican II liturgy is an interesting, though not flawless, read, for those just beginning to familiarize themselves with liturgical history, and somewhat less so for those who are already familiar with the arguments supporting each position.

This book was republished because it deals with issues that have taken on renewed significance in Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate. It carries a preface written by then-Cardinal Ratzinger, containing the oft-quoted words: "What happened after the Council was something else entirely: in the place of liturgy as the fruit of development came fabricated liturgy. We abandoned the organic, living process of growth and development over the centuries, and replaced it – as in a manufacturing process – with a

fabrication, a banal, on-the-spot product." Gamber shows us, in an unemotional, objective way, just what is deficient.

Gamber's position falls somewhere between the "Tridentine is the only solution" view of prolific author Michael Davies, and the "Tridentine is passé; rewrite the *Novus Ordo*" position of Helen Hull Hitchcock, founder of *Adoremus*. This book actually consists of two sections: the first, written in 1993, is titled the same as the book. The second, written in 1987, called "Facing the Lord: On the Building of Churches and Facing East in Prayer", concerns itself with the history of the layout of sanctuaries, Catholic and non. While there is a common theme to both sections, there is a frustrating repetitiveness. Several of the same points made in Part I are restated, and reargued, in Part II. Perhaps 10% of the book is wholly redundant.

If you have read other, similar studies of the Liturgical Reform, you will notice one significant difference about this book: Gamber, a German, cites almost exclusively German academic sources to support his arguments, most of whom this writer has never heard mentioned before. Even the reformers are German: Gamber attributes the beginning of the push for vernacularization and sanctuary reordering to one Pius Parsch, who conceived a "Liturgy of the People" in the 1930s. He cites the German "Youth Masses" of the 1950s as taking then-unusual risks, such as having people waving banners in the sanctuary during Mass.

Gamber's conclusions amount to the following: 1) What Vatican II called for, and what ultimately became the norm for *Novus Ordo* Masses in the typical Catholic parish, are quite different. 2) The transitional 1965 Missal represented a more authentic implementation of Vatican II's call for updating the liturgy than did the 1970 *Novus Ordo*. 3) The reordering of the Roman Calendar was unprecedented and excessively different. 4) The primary cause of the desacralization of the liturgy is due to the implementation of celebrating Holy Mass facing the people. This positioning, along with the common non-symmetrical arrangement of candles and flowers on a freestanding altar, creates a loss of focal point. The traditional orientation of priest and people facing the same way, at a symmetrically arranged altar (even a freestanding one) eliminates the priest's temptation to "perform" for the congregation, and focuses the priest and congregation's attention on the sacrifice taking place. These are familiar arguments, but rarely are they supported as well as Gamber does, by way of historical citations and footnoted references. Particularly interesting are Gamber's comparisons to efforts to update the Orthodox liturgy and sanctuary layout. His only logic flaw is to condemn the existence of options in the *Novus Ordo* on one hand, and yet recommend more options in the Tridentine on the other, for example freedom in choosing readings (a particularly dangerous option, in this writer's opinion).

Gamber calls for Rome to restore the Tridentine Mass to full freedom and equality alongside the new rite, as a gesture of support for legitimate diversity, and to demonstrate continuity in our faith. The prospects for this happening have never been stronger than under our present Holy Father, and Gamber shows ample evidence why this can only help the Church.

