

THE COLLECTS AND POSTCOMMUNIONS OF THE REVISED ROMAN MISSAL*†

It is an honour, and I might add, an anxiety for me to address you here on the Collects and Postcommunions of the Revised Roman Missal. An honour, on account of the decisive role your Society has played for over a century in the liturgical renewal within the Church of Scotland. An anxiety, because the Roman Catholic Mass – so dear to myself – is, in the last resort, what divides our two churches. My one aim is to let the texts of the Collects and Postcommunions speak for themselves, and be a bond rather than a barrier between us.

The New Missal: A Succinct Presentation

The new Missal, promulgated in 1970, is the second official Missal of the Roman Church. The first was promulgated exactly 400 years earlier, in 1570, in the wake of the Council of Trent, and has been in use ever since, in successive editions.

The new Missal of Vatican II differs from its predecessor in many points, particularly with regard to the three presidential prayers said by the priest in the name of the assembly: the Collect, Prayer over the Offerings and Postcommunion. Their total number has been greatly increased to approximately 1600.¹ Many new prayers have been composed to give expression to the hopes and needs of our time; some of the older prayers have been altered in order to suit a more positive view of earthly realities, or to give a more realistic reflection of Church discipline, particularly in the observance of Lent. I might add that any polemical or unecumenical note in the former prayers has either been toned down or removed. This is particularly noticeable in the prayer for Jews on Good Friday, but is also to be seen in the prayers for some of the Counter-Reformation saints.²

The Collect and the Postcommunion are, respectively, the opening and closing prayers said by the priest at Mass. The Collect rounds off the opening rites and is followed directly by the Scripture readings. The Postcommunion rounds off the communion rite and

* *MISSALE ROMANUM*, ex decreto Sacrosancti oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II *Instauratum*, auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum. Editio Typica. Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis. MCMLXXX.

† Address delivered by Dom Placid Murray, O.S.B., Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick, to the Annual Meeting of the Society, 21 May 1971.

is followed immediately by the brief dismissal rite. They are, if you like, the front and back rooms on the ground floor of this beautifully restored ancient mansion of the Mass.

If we take a walk around these rooms we notice that in line with modern taste in restoration, a good deal of furniture has been removed. The rule now is that there is to be only one Collect and one Postcommunion in each Mass. Furthermore, although the prayers are still couched in the traditional collect form, they are now printed in sense lines. This reflects a new awareness of the needs of a spoken style in a vernacular liturgy. Perhaps I should mention here that the English translation of the new Missal is not yet complete, apart from the services and Masses of Holy Week. Most of the translations I have provided in the summary come from a private translation made in Glenstal for our own use.

In our walk around these rooms, we can only be selective, and I wish to suggest three main themes to you:

1. The Image of Christ that is reflected here.
2. The enlarged scope of Christian Prayer.
3. The effects of the Eucharist in Christian living.

1. *The Image of Christ*

The more I read and re-read these prayers, the stronger the impression grows on me that our Lord is presented here in a dogmatic rather than a historical way. What I mean is that the mystery of Christ is presented in the round rather than in the historical details of the events of His life. However, the prayers are not said in a vacuum; the very full Scripture readings of the new Lectionary present the historical figure of Jesus in the Gospels; these in turn are illustrated by passages from the Old Testament, while the remainder of the New Testament is read in semi-continuous extracts. Perhaps there is an advantage then in the prayers keeping to the mystery in the round, and leaving the details to the Scripture readings. The prayers are biblical in content, but not slavishly so in language.

The new Missal scores here over its predecessor, since, strange to relate, the prayers of the former Roman Missal were seldom directly christological, even in the high points of the Christian year. This shortcoming has been deliberately remedied in the new Missal, and may be seen to best advantage in the Masses for the seasons of Easter and of Christmas. I seem to notice a certain difference here between the treatment of the Image of Christ in the Collect and in the Postcommunion: in the Collect the mystery is presented as it exists in itself, but in the Postcommunions it is seen as filtered through the Sacrament. In the Collect it is a question of faith, of spiritual understanding; the Postcommunion in more muted tones expresses

the spiritual impact of the sacramental encounter, a sharing in the mystery. Compare the Collect and the Postcommunion of the second Sunday of Easter:

COLLECT

O God of eternal mercy,
 each Easter You rouse again the faith of your people:
 increase your grace in our hearts
 so that we may understand
 with whose Blood we have been redeemed,
 in what waters we have been cleansed,
 of what Spirit we have been given new birth. (p. 299)

POSTCOMMUNION

May our communion in the Easter Mystery, Lord,
 last on at work in our minds and hearts.

Perhaps we have a clue here to the unity of Word and Sacrament in the Eucharist: they are not rival, but rather complementary, expressions of the mystery of Christ. Christ is at the same time our Prophet and our Priest: he offers two dishes at the eucharistic feast, one from the table of the Word, the other from that of His Body and Blood. There was a certain difference in his two roles: as a Prophet he taught, as a Priest He suffered. It is to our own peril if we neglect either aspect of his mediatorial work.³

Professor John Barkley has said 'His [Christ's] sacrifice is not repeatable, but is continually renewed. . . .'⁴ This is a constant theme in the Postcommunions, as for instance that of the 17th Sunday *per annum*:

We have received, Lord, your divine Sacrament
 – the abiding Memorial of the Passion of your Son –
 and we ask that this Gift
 which He himself, in his infinite love, bequeathed to us,
 may increase your salvation within us. (p. 356)

The theme of living from Christ's Word is stated vividly in two of the Masses for Lent. The Collect for the second Sunday of Lent (in line with the Gospel of the day – the Transfiguration) prays for the nourishment of the Word of God:

COLLECT

Father,
 You wish us to listen to your Son, your chosen One,
 and to do what He tells us:
 nourish our hearts on your Word,
 enlighten the eyes of our soul
 and let us see your Glory. (p. 192)

The same theme appears in the Postcommunion for the first Sunday in Lent (with reference to the Gospel about Christ's temptation in the desert):

Teach us Lord to hunger after Christ
 the Living and True Bread from heaven:
 now that we have tasted that Bread
 which feeds our faith, quickens our hope and strengthens our
 charity,
 and then we shall live on every word that You utter. (p. 185)

The Image of Christ then in the prayers is refracted through the prism of the Eucharist and the Word of God. Both Word and Sacrament, however, are in turn filtered to us through a further sacrament, that of Baptism. The references to Baptism are particularly frequent in the Masses for Eastertide, including one surprising Postcommunion which says:

You have given us Lord the fullness of baptismal grace:
 prepare our hearts to work for the eternal happiness
 You destine for us. (p. 294)

The Easter Vigil, the Mass celebrated on the night between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday morning, is in a very special way a link between Baptism and the Eucharist on the very night of the Resurrection. There is a special 'baptismal liturgy' inserted into this Mass, while the liturgy of the Word consists of a lengthy set of Old Testament readings. Collects are inserted between the readings, transposing them into a Christian setting, with reference to Baptism. Thus after the third reading about the passage of Israel through the Red Sea (Exod. 14:15-15:1) the Collect is:

Father, even today we see the wonders
 of the miracles you worked long ago.
 You once saved a single nation from slavery,
 and now you offer that salvation to all through baptism.
 May the peoples of the world become true sons of Abraham
 and prove worthy of the heritage of Israel.⁵

Another of these collects situates our Baptism within the passover mystery of Christ, and this itself is set within the total scriptural context of both Old and New Testaments:

Father, you teach us
 in both the Old and the New Testament
 to celebrate the passover mystery.
 Help us to understand your great love for us.
 May the goodness you now show us
 confirm our hope in your future mercy.⁶

The Missal also provides a Mass for Christian Initiation, which allows of baptism being celebrated within the celebration of the Eucharist. One of the Postcommunions links baptism and Eucharist together:

We have proclaimed, Lord,
the great Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of your Son in
our celebration:
grant, by the power of this sacrament,
that we may also proclaim it in our lives. (p. 735)

Besides this range of truths concerning the Image of Christ in his work for us, there is a further (and prior) range of truths about his Person. This is often treated of in an ambiguous way by some theologians today: we are left guessing as to whether the Son of God existed at all before the Incarnation. The Missal Collects for Advent and Christmastide leave us in no doubt about the matter. Thus:

A new Day dawned on us, Lord,
when your Only-begotten Son came among us:
grant that as He is our Brother in his body
through His Birth from the Virgin Mary,
so may we become his brothers in His Kingdom of grace. (p. 176)

Or again:

Father,
You looked in pity on fallen mankind
and redeemed us by the Coming of your Son:
grant that as we profess our firm and humble faith
in His Incarnation,
so we may have some part with Him – our Redeemer. (p. 147)

We have taken a look at the pictures on one wall of our two rooms; our quest was: What image of Christ do these prayers offer? And our answer must be that it is above all the mystery of Christ as operative here and now in the liturgy that is stressed, the ‘paschal mystery’ as the documents of Vatican II call it. Christ’s redemptive work is seen as one great total event embracing especially his Passion, Death and Resurrection as a single mystery. This is the classic soteriology, especially of Saint Leo, to whose writings many of these prayers are heavily indebted. The stress then is on Christ as Mediator and Saviour – viewed neither simply as God, nor as simply man, but in a third aspect, as Priest *in* and *according* to his human nature.

2. *The Scope of Christian Prayer*

Let us now turn to another broad aspect of the prayers of the Missal – the scope of Christian Prayer. Here we discover that one of

the solid walls of our room has been removed, and in its place there is a large glass panel, through which we look directly from the place of the eucharistic celebration out into the great busy City of Man. In this newer section of the Missal there is deliberate, I would almost say self-conscious, openness to modern conditions and modern needs. The language of these prayers is based directly on that of the Documents of Vatican II; it is a dignified, sober prose, but which perhaps is not yet fully mature as a language of prayer.

The forty-six Masses in this section are grouped under the four major heads of the Church, Public Affairs, Various General Needs and More Particular Needs. The very pattern of proceeding from the more general needs of Church and mankind first of all, shows the newer thinking of the Church primarily as the whole People of God, and of mankind as the great human family. Both these ideas are basic in the Vatican documents.⁷

There are newer, unofficial currents among Roman Catholics as among other Christians composing experimental liturgies. This confrontation of the world and the Church in liturgy is their favourite field; sometimes they go too far I feel, since they seem to place social concern instead of the Mystery of Christ, as the heart of their celebration. The Missal prayers are open to the needs of man – the laity, the sanctification of work, Christian unity, the developing countries – but they turn first to the Gospel and the Eucharist before setting us to carry out these human tasks. One example among many others will make this clear:

POSTCOMMUNION

In this wonderful Sacrament, Lord,
 You console and fortify your Church,
 grant that your People may so cleave to Christ through this
 mystery,
 that they may build up your eternal kingdom in freedom,
 through the time-bound tasks they accomplish. (p. 773)

Some of the former prayers in the Missal were judged to be too other-worldly, as if they taught a negative or hostile attitude towards true human endeavours. One phrase in particular in the former Postcommunion for the second Sunday of Advent, *terrena despiciere* (literally 'to despise earthly or worldly things') vexed many people. I still feel there is a sense in which this is a perfectly valid Christian prayer for us all, and not only for the other-worldly among us. Does not Saint John say, 'Anyone who loves the world is a stranger to the Father's love' (I John 2:16, N.E.B.)? At all events, the offending phrase was removed, and replaced by the phrase 'terrena sapienter perpendere', so that the whole prayer now runs:

Teach us, Lord
 to share in the mystery of the spiritual food we have eaten,
 and through it
 teach us *to weigh the things of this life in their true value,*
 and to abide in the things of eternity. (p. 130)

Perhaps the most extreme cases of openness to modern needs may be seen in the prayer for atheists, among the General Intercessions on Good Friday. This prayer implies that we Christians may be in part to blame for atheism, a point that was already made in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World.⁸ This particular prayer runs as follows:

Almighty and eternal God,
 you created mankind
 so that all might long to find you
 and have peace when you are found.
 Grant that, in spite of the hurtful things
 that stand in their way,
 they may all recognize in the lives of Christians
 the tokens of your love and mercy,
 and gladly acknowledge you
 as the one true God and Father of us all.⁹

One last glimpse from this particular vantage point of the scope of Christian Prayer is the prayer for the local church. This too is in line with a good deal of the teaching of Vatican II; this particular prayer should be of special interest to you in the Church of Scotland tradition. It runs:

In each and every Church throughout the world,
 a pilgrim on its way,
 You manifest, Lord,
 the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church:
 grant to your people
 to be so united to its pastor
 and to be so gathered together
 by the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit,
 that it may worthily represent the universality of your People,
 and be at once a sign and an instrument
 of the presence of Christ in the world. (p. 774)

3. *The Effects of the Eucharist in Christian Living*

Our third and last wall of the room is that of the effects of the Eucharist in Christian living. Here too the wall is transparent, there is no opaque division between the Eucharist and life. It is mainly in the Postcommunions throughout the whole Missal that we find these

effects delineated. From the literary point of view these Postcommunions have a lighter touch than the prayers based on the Vatican documents; there is nearly always some image to light up the line. Many of these Postcommunions, although new to the Missal, come in fact from older sources which had only been partially represented in the former Missal. In linking the Eucharist and life, these Postcommunions do not labour the point about social involvement; they are, rather, expressing a wish that the 'good odour of Christ' may cling about us as we go through the daily round of life. This phrase of Saint Paul's is in fact taken up in one text:

Grant, Lord,
that as You nourish us with your Sacraments,
we may be worthy to be the fragrance of Christ. (p. 242)

The Postcommunions for the Advent season are among the finest in the Missal. The season of Advent is used as a preparation for Christmas, but also as a reminder of, and a preparation for, the Second Coming. Thus, on the first Sunday in Advent:

As we walk through the changing scenes of life, Lord,
You are teaching us evermore
through the celebration of Mass
to set our love on the thought of heaven
and to cling to what will endure. (p. 129)

Or again, that for the Friday of the second week:

Give an edge, Lord,
to our watching and waiting for the coming of Christ:
and when He comes,
may we, as He himself our Saviour urged us,
hasten to meet Him with lamps aflame. (p. 139)

The note of pilgrimage is strongly marked in the Postcommunions. Thus, for the third Sunday of Lent:

You give us, Lord, the Bread from heaven already now,
although we are still but pilgrims here on earth.
Grant that as we eat this Hidden Manna,
what is celebrated as a mystery at the altar
may be seen to be at work in our daily living. (p. 202)

Again, for Tuesday in Holy Week:

Here in the passing course of time, Lord,
You allow us eat to and drink of your Sacrament:
may it be for us our way into eternal life.

Spiritual renewal through the Eucharist is also a constant theme:

In this Mass, as at every Mass, Lord,
 we have shown forth the death of Christ
 until He comes again in glory.
 May we share in that glory when He comes;
 and as we wait for His return
 may the Sacrament we have received
 renew us in mind and body. (p. 365; 26th Sunday *per annum*)

Conclusion

Dr. Stuart Loudon in *The True Face of the Kirk* speaks of the 'present liturgical practice of a church', no matter how difficult to define and characterize, as being 'the only authentic indication of the particular character of a church.'¹⁰

I have tried to show how the prayers of the new Missal give an authentic indication of the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass, in the Catholic Church today. In our confused and difficult times, the Missal speaks clearly of the mystery of Christ, Son of God made man; it opens the prayer of the Church to all the needs of mankind, and it presents the Eucharist as our *viaticum*, our food for the journey through life.

When accepting the invitation to speak to you, I said to Mr. Ross that I would omit the other series of prayers, those said over the offerings. I did so, not because I felt there was any skeleton in the cupboard of that particular room of the mansion, but because these prayers would require to be treated separately. Some day we will all have to see where we differ and where we agree about the meaning of Mass. Might I suggest that these prayers of the Missal will then provide for us all, whether Roman Catholics or members of the Church of Scotland, the great point of verification in our day, of where our roads parted company four hundred years ago?

NOTES

1. A. Bugnini, 'De editione Missalis Romani Instaurati: "Paulus Episcopus plebi Dei"': *Notitiae*, 54, May 1970, p. 163. This is more than double the number of prayers in the former Missal.
2. C. Braga, "Il Proprium de Sanctis": *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 84 (1970), pp. 420, 421.
3. Cf. J. H. Newman, 'The Three Offices of Christ': *Sermons on Subjects of the Day* (ed. 1872), pp. 52-62. Cf. also his Essay on the three offices of the Church contained in the 'Preface to the Third Edition' of the *Via Media* (1877).

4. *The Worship of the Reformed Church* (1966), p. 87.
5. *Holy Week* (1971), Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland, p. 50.
6. *Holy Week*, p. 56.
7. A. Pistoia, 'Messe e orazioni rituali "ad diversa" e votive'; *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 84 (1970), p. 443.
8. W. M. Abbot (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (1966), pp. 215-20.
9. *Holy Week*, p. 25.
10. p. 52.

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