

SOME FURTHER CLARIFICATIONS...

In relation to the ongoing debate about the Dialog Mass

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After the publication of my article “Liturgical Principles & Notions Concerning the Dialog Mass” in June 2009, two lengthy rebuttals followed; in August by Mr. Brian McCall, and in September by Fr. Edward Black. Though I believe the points made were sufficient to the debate, the rebuttals do allow for some further clarifications the limited space of my article could not include.

An Unfortunate Liturgical Situation; not an Organic Development

The nature of the Liturgy is identical to that of the Church (*i.e.*, Christ), being comprised of divine and human elements. While the divine elements have been dictated by Our Lord Jesus Christ, the human elements He left to the Church to develop and enrich. The Church in turn developed a profusion of liturgical rites according to various cultures comprising His Mystical Body.

Due to man’s fallen nature and despite the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the Church’s human elements often fail; the current crisis keenly reminds us of this. In this respect, human interference can also negatively impact the liturgy, either through abuses, a diminishment of use, or even extinction (*e.g.*, the now-defunct Sarum, Celtic, and York Rites). So contrary to one rebuttal’s assertion, an “unfortunate” situation can indeed occur in liturgical matters.

But moreover, one can hardly attribute what was the destructive result of a succession of anti-Catholic revolutions that convulsed Western Europe from the Protestant Reformation until the late 19th century as an “organic development,” let alone the work of the Holy Ghost. Here I refer to the near loss of Gregorian chant, thus the diminishing of sung Masses and consequently the laity’s participation through singing. That this was actually a *tragic loss* and not an organic development is borne by the fact that the joint-re-establishment of Gregorian chant and the active participation of the faithful have always been called a “*restoration*.” As stated in Pope St. Pius X’s *motu proprio, Tra le Sollecitudini* (November 22, 1903):

The ancient traditional Gregorian Chant must, therefore, in a large measure be restored to the functions of public worship, and the fact must be accepted by all that an ecclesiastical function loses none of its solemnity when accompanied by this music alone.

Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part in the ecclesiastical offices, as was the case in ancient times. [my emphasis]

A 20th Century Novelty?

A persistent assertion by Dialog Mass opponents is that the “silent” Low Mass is *The* Roman practice, while the faithful responding is a “novelty of the 20th century.” History not only contradicts this view, but shows that the more common and *traditional method* of the faithful’s attendance at Low Mass *was to respond*. These pertinent points also reveal that the circumstance of the faithful becoming “*mute spectators*” (as stated by Pope St. Pius X) existed for only a *relatively short period* in the entire spectrum of the Western Church’s liturgical history.

As previously noted in my article (ff 26), there is evidence that when Low Mass was in its developmental infancy (circa 600 to 900) the faithful were responding *even then* in some manner. But more to our purpose, this practice is firmly evidenced by contemporary writers of the 13th—18th centuries; hence, when the spoken Low Mass became the more frequent form of the public liturgy, the faithful often *continued responding* in some manner. A few of these evidences are: Cardinal Lotario de’Conte’s book, *De Sacrificio Missae* (13th century),¹ the decrees of the Council of Basle (circa 1425),² a letter of an Italian secretary to a Spanish

¹ Later Pope Innocent III (†1216); he outlines several of the faithful’s responses during a Pontifical Mass, including “*Amen*” to the Collects, and of saying the “*Suscipiat*” he states “*is most fitting answered by many*.” Cf. p 29 in *The Dialog Mass* by Fr. Gerald Ellard, S.J. (Longmans, Green & Co., 1942) for a fuller description.

² The more common practice of the faithful responding at Low Mass is shown by the papal-convened council which *condemned* as a “northern abuse” the so-called “silent Mass” wherein the priest would say the prayers so quietly that the people could not hear them or make the responses. Cf. p 103 of *The Mass of the Future* by Fr. Gerald Ellard (Bruce, 1948) for a full account (NB: despite certain reservations about this book, nevertheless it contains many pertinent references and orthodox conclusions).

Cardinal (1518),³ a letter of Giovanni Michiel, a Venetian ambassador to England (circa 1550),⁴ and Pope Benedict XIV's book, *Sacrosancto Sacrificio Missae* (1748, citing a text from 1620).⁵

That this "dialoging" was not everywhere practiced identically or according to the same options permitted today is immaterial. What *is material* is that the *same* elements that comprise the Dialog Mass were being practiced *just prior* to the Council of Trent and conceivably after, as it was not proscribed by the council or the missal reform. This undeniably demonstrates that this was *not* a novelty of the 20th century, but in reality, was simply another legitimate *restoration* of a *traditional* practice that had diminished.

Moreover, this restoration was not any more a "novelty" or form of antiquarianism than the restoration of Gregorian chant which was integral to the rightful participation of the faithful, the reception of Holy Communion by the faithful during Mass, and allowing young children to receive Holy Communion once they had reached the age of reason; all items restored or enacted during the 20th century.

It should be further noted that the restoration of an option for the faithful to respond during Low Mass was *contingent on the joint restoration of sacred music and the active participation of the faithful*.⁶ Such a reform though was delayed until the 20th century due to the numerous afflictions that beset the Holy See requiring the popes to focus on other priorities. Moreover, the complicated and sensitive issue of the Solesmes and Ratisbon editions of the chant books also had to be resolved, which occurred under Pope Leo XIII;⁷ finally, it took a pope of St. Pius X's determination to actually implement such a reform.⁸ As for the assertion that the Dialog Mass was not generally practiced in English-speaking countries before the 1960's, such an unsubstantiated claim falls flat in the United States upon review of the studies and censuses provided in Fr. Ellard's 1942 book, *The Dialogue Mass*.⁹

An Optional Matter and the Church's Liturgical Ideal

Despite the Holy See clearly stating that the Dialog Mass is an *optional practice*, opponents often give the impression that its use is of obligation and subsequently will lead to the abolishment of the *missa privata*; considering the latter form is unique to the Latin Church this is not only quite doubtful, but not even desirable. It is possible however that the daily *public* Low Masses in the Latin Rites might *again* be generally practiced according to a sung form (with hymns or *Kyriale*), dialoged, or even a combination of both. Not only was this previously the more common *Western practice*, but it continues to be *the practice for the faithful* in the Eastern Rites.

In this vein, it must be remembered that Low Mass is an abbreviated derivative of Solemn Mass,¹⁰ which is *the* liturgical ideal of the Latin Church. So objectively-speaking, we should not prefer Low Mass (not even a dialoged one), to a sung Mass, as Pope Pius XII states in *Mediator Dei* (n. 106):

Besides, a "dialogue" Mass of this kind cannot replace the high [Solemn] Mass, which, as a matter of fact, though it should be offered with only the sacred ministers present, possesses its own special dignity due to the impressive character of its ritual and the magnificence of its ceremonies. The splendor and grandeur of a high Mass, however, are very much increased if, as the Church desires, the people are present in great numbers and with devotion.

³ Who during a journey to Flanders (a northern region), remarked in opposition to the practice in Spain and Italy that "*These Flemings... They do not permit anyone to make the responses, except the servers, and no one else...*". Again, cf: p 103 of *The Mass of the Future* for a full account.

⁴ He was posted at London and wrote of the "*Roman and southern rule*" (*i.e.*, of the faithful responding during Low Mass) in opposition to the "*sotte voce*" practice in England. *Ibid*, p 103, etc.

⁵ In his book on the Mass the pope says, "*Formerly the people in attendance were accustomed to respond to the celebrant, as Visconti proves with irrefragable arguments in his book...*" J. Visconti's book, *Observationes Ecclesiasticae de Antiquis Missae Ritibus* (1620). Cf: p 34 of *The Dialog Mass*, which in turn cites Benedictine Dom Gaspar Lefebvre's own study on the Dialog Mass: "*La Question de la Mess Dialoguée*," excerpted from pp 143-196 of the publication, *La Participation Active des Fidèles au Culte* (Louvain; Mont-César, 1934).

⁶ "*It was the Gregorian Motu proprio that was my inspiration: I applied to low Mass of every day what His Holiness says of the solemn or Sunday Mass.*" A quote from Fr. Pierard, the priest who introduced the Dialog Mass in his Belgium parish around 1908, as cited in *The Dialog Mass*, p 41.

⁷ Cf. *Papal Legislation*, pp 145-193 for a historical account on this matter.

⁸ Two books that depict St. Pius X's monumental liturgical efforts: the formerly cited *Papal Legislation* by Msgr. Hayburn, and Yves Chiron's *Saint Pius X: Restorer of the Church* (Angelus Press, 2002).

⁹ Cf. chapters VI-VIII (titled respectively, "American Bishops and Sodalists: Twenty-Five American Bishops and One Hundred Sees," "La Crosse Points the Way," and "Chicagoland's Official Survey"), pp 86-171.

¹⁰ As Rev. J.B. O'Connell writes on p 599, ff 10, in *The Celebration of Mass: A Study of the Rubrics of the Roman Missal* (reprinted by Preserving Christian Publications): "*Low Mass is a simpler rite devised for the celebration of Mass as it were in private when only the celebrant and one server take part.*"

Further testimony from no less a liturgical authority as Dr. Adrian Fortescue who wrote for *The Catholic Encyclopedia*:

This high [Solemn] Mass is the norm; it is only in the complete rite with deacon and subdeacon that the ceremonies can be understood. Thus, the rubrics of the Ordinary of the Mass always suppose that the Mass is high [Solemn]. Low Mass, said by a priest alone with one server, is a shortened and simplified form of the same thing. Its ritual can be explained only by a reference to high Mass. (...) A *sung Mass (missa Cantata)* is a modern compromise.¹¹ [my underlined emphasis]

This quote is connected to another important notion: “*In low Mass the celebrant has to supply their [deacon’s and subdeacon’s] parts as well as those of the choir*”¹² because they are not present, not to show a clerical distinction between the priest and others as some have contended. The presence of this Low Mass rubric during Solemn Mass, which caused an unnecessary duplication of texts for the sacred ministers, was finally rectified in 1960 via the reformed code of rubrics (*Rubricarum Instructum*, July 26, 1960).

The Order and Position of the Acolyte

Another common assertion is that the Dialog Mass diminishes the grooming of vocations amongst altar boys by confusing the role of the laity with that of the clergy. This claim though is based upon a misunderstanding of the office and the *object* of ministering at the altar.

The acolyte’s object is to attend the sacred ministers at the altar according to the office being exercised and through this service fulfill the virtue of religion while sanctifying his soul. While a boy might be inspired through such service (and equally as well by singing in the schola) to consider a religious vocation, nevertheless, this is simply an *effect*, but not the *cause* for serving. This becomes clearer upon recalling that the acolyte is the highest of the minor orders, whereby the cleric, having responded to his Creator’s *vocare*, has already chosen and been accepted to prepare for the priesthood.

As for the faithful “taking over the role of the server” by making the responses (which as explained in my article the acolyte absorbed from the absent ministers and schola), the acolyte’s essential office during Mass is defined in its ordination rite: to minister the cruets and bear the candles in procession. Other duties, such as ringing the bells or making the responses (both of which even a woman may do when no server is available), are secondary, hence, not essential to the acolyte’s role *per se* (e.g., at a *missa cantata*, the server does not make the *sung* responses but is limited to the *spoken* prayers). Furthermore, in the context of a Dialog Mass, it is more proper to have the server *lead* the faithful in making the responses.

Conflating Antiquarianism versus Eastern Rite Precedents

The points I made about the *witness* (or *practice*) of *universal tradition* were given not only to provide proof of what the original and continual practice of the *entire* Church has been, but also that certain practices are not theological aberrations as claimed by some. To close our minds completely and ignore these legitimate examples is what I call “liturgical tunnel vision.” As for *Quo Primum*, it has nothing to do with the Eastern Rites as testified within its own text: “*This ordinance applies... [to those churches and religious orders] in accord with the rites and customs of the Roman Church.*”

Furthermore, should we consider such universals as the various ministers’ roles, bells, vestments, incense, candles, chant and liturgical books *as examples of conflation*? Obviously no, for these consist of *universal practices*, just as the manner in which the faithful have always and everywhere generally participated during the liturgy, save for a *short* period in the Western Church of “*liturgical decadence*”¹³

What is often overlooked by such claims of conflation is that the Roman Rite is itself *not purely Roman*; in fact, a characteristic of *romantias* was to assimilate the best from various cultures and re-cast them according to a Roman mold. For instance, the *Agnus Dei* was added to the Roman Mass by Pope Sergius I (a Syrian), various rites of Holy Week are derived from similar ceremonies developed at Jerusalem, while many of our most cherished Marian feasts come from the East: “*The feasts of the Purification, the Annunciation, Assumption and Nativity come from the Byzantine Church, and were taken over by Pope Sergius I, who was himself an*

¹¹ Under the listing “Liturgy of the Mass; The Present Roman Mass” (Robert Appleton Co., 1913).

¹² *The Celebration of Mass*, p 599, ff 11; my emphasis.

¹³ As remarked by Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, the famed compiler of the *St. Andrew’s Daily Missal* and the magnificent book, *How to Understand the Mass* (reprinted by Catholic Authors Press), and quoted by Fr. Michael Simoulin (SSPX) in “Attendance at Mass and Participation in the Liturgy” (*The Angelus*, March 1997).

*Eastern.*¹⁴ The Roman Rite has also “conflated” itself by borrowing practices from other Latin Rites; for instance some of the Roman Mass’ most dramatic parts are derived from the now-defunct Gallican Rite (itself heavily influenced by the Eastern Rites), such as incensing the altar before the Introit, the Offertory prayers, even the beloved processions of Candlemas and Palm Sunday.

Certainly we must reject the “anything but Roman” attitude adopted by some liberally-minded liturgists, which posits that the Roman Rite requires “improvement” by adopting certain Eastern practices, or *liturgical sensibilities*, which they considered superior to those in the West. In most of these instances, the Latin Rite practices were developed beyond ancient ones (which the East has mostly retained), usually to better defend a doctrine against heresy or error. A chief example is the unique sense of respect and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament embodied in the corpus of reverences (*e.g.*, genuflections) and devotions (*e.g.*, Benediction) that is the hallmark of Roman Catholicism.¹⁵ So for the Latin Church, to return to an ancient, but less-developed form of reverencing the Real Presence is an example of the error of antiquarianism.

The concept of antiquarianism was often desired by liberal reformers to promote texts or practices that are ambiguous to contemporary Westerners, thus more open to an ecumenical interpretation. This is exactly what happened in the *Novus Ordo Missae* by relying on the 2nd century Liturgy of St. Hippolytus. For his time, the texts were completely orthodox, but for modern, post-Reformation Western minds they are ambiguous, because the doctrines of the Mass, the priesthood’s propitiatory and sacrificial nature, and the Real Presence were not under attack then, hence not required to be as well-defined.

It is ironic though, let alone erroneous, to accuse the Dialog Mass as being a form of antiquarianism, when that error was condemned within the very encyclical (*Mediator Dei*) that *encouraged* this practice.

Laity Missals

Included with Fr. Black’s article was a Civil War photograph with the caption “*no hand missals, no dialogue*” which is quite misleading. Who actually displays their daily missal when posing for a picture? Does one typically see spouses holding their missals in a wedding picture? In fact, these soldiers could have used a missal published before the war,¹⁶ or left their missals at home due to the rigors of military life. And since there is no vested altar server in view, it is even remotely possible that the soldiers were responding *in unison* to the priest, considering several English missals were already promoting such a practice.

Whatever the case may have been, the caption’s inference is rather pointless, for the fact is that *they did not absolutely need a missal* to intelligibly follow the Mass. Nor too did our ancient (and perhaps illiterate) forefathers during the age of Christendom when Catholics were suckled from birth on Gregorian chant, the psalms and sacred scripture; a pedagogical form which we call the “immersion method” in our age of literacy (an ironic concept, considering that Roman Catholics cannot even bring themselves to learn Latin, the tongue of Holy Mother Church).

But while it is agreed upon that laity missals are not strictly necessary to follow Mass, nevertheless, it is undeniable that these are of great benefit, hence why popes (*e.g.*, Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*) and liturgists (*e.g.*, Dom Gueranger’s *Liturgical Year*) have strongly recommended their use. As for the topic of the Ordinary’s vernacular translation for such prayer books,¹⁷ this alternated back and forth during an approximate 300-year period, but ultimately the Holy See (under the supervision of orthodox popes) allowed such translations so the faithful could profit from the actual Mass texts.

Leading to the Vernacular and the *Novus Ordo*?

It has frequently been asserted that the Dialog Mass leads to the vernacular and a blurring of the distinction between the roles of the clergy and laity, specifically the celebrant’s sacrificial-mediatory. The obvious question that must be first asked: if such latent problems exist for the laity responding in a *spoken* voice, why do these not exist when they are *singing*?

¹⁴ Cf. *The Development of Christian Worship: An Outline of Liturgical History* by Dom Benedict Steuart (Longmans, 1953), p 284.

¹⁵ Cf. Archdale A. King’s *Eucharistic Reservation in the Western Church* (Sheed and Ward, 1965) for details on the Latin Church’s historical development in this area.

¹⁶ Cf. the appendix, “Bishop England and the Missal in English,” pp 198-208 in *The Progress of the Liturgy: An Historical Sketch From the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to the Pontificate of Pius X*, Dom Oliver Rousseau, OSB (Newman Press, 1951), for account of this missal printed in 1822 whose translation was obtained from subsequent approved editions printed in England and Ireland.

¹⁷ For a good historical overview of this issue, cf. *Dynamic Equivalence: The Living Language of Christian Worship*, Keith Pecklers (The Liturgical Press, 2003). Though the author writes from the stance of the wholesale liturgical use of the vernacular, nevertheless, the work is an excellent historical reference on the vernacular topic and of the development of laity missals.

To the first, while some involved in the Liturgical Movement advocated a wider liturgical use of the vernacular, however, they rarely promoted the Dialog Mass for that specific purpose. Some attempt to point to the partial-vernacular *Deutsche Singmesse* as example of such efforts connected to the Dialog Mass, but in fact this is a *separate* issue, as the former had *already been in use* for nearly two hundred years.

Applicable to our discussion though, is the fact the Roman Church has not condemned the possibility of utilizing the vernacular in the liturgy. For instance, when some Council Fathers at Trent proposed such a notion for pastoral reasons, the matter was duly discussed and not simply shot down as inconceivable.¹⁸ In the end, the Council decided *that due to the proximity of the Protestant reformers' call for liturgical services in the vernacular*, the time was “*non expedire*”¹⁹ to translate the Mass into the “*vulgar tongue*.” Thus, it was a *prudential* decision, not a theological one.

Hence, the claim that the introduction of the vernacular led to the heterodox catastrophe of the *Novus Ordo Missae* is an over-simplification. It was not the vernacular that led to doctrinal errors, it was Modernism; nor do these two things necessarily go hand-in-hand. For instance, a multitude of carefully-made and doctrinally-sound vernacular translations existed in a plethora of daily missals, yet these were not utilized by the liberal innovators in creating the New Mass. This betrayed their underlying agenda of wishing to recast the liturgy of the Mass in a purposely ambiguous and ecumenical mold (specifically, to remove any stumbling blocks with the Protestants). Conversely, when orthodox persons were in charge, a well-regulated and clear translation was the result instead. A perfect example is Fr. Philip Weller's Latin-English 1945 edition of *The Roman Ritual*,²⁰ which was intended for the clergy to administrate the sacramentals and for the laity as a catechetical guide.

All such arguments aside though, I propose that the *decisive argument* against the wholesale use of the vernacular can be found in Prof. Christine Mohrmann's *Liturgical Latin: Its Origin and Character*,²¹ wherein she explains the subtle importance of shrouding the Faith's mysteries in a sacral and hieratic language. She also demonstrates that the older Latin used within the Mass (*i.e.*, the so-called *Vetus Itala* and Vulgate forms) is actually not the colloquial Latin used in the Roman Empire (as has been commonly claimed), but in fact conforms to *a specific hieratic style* used only in worship, hence reserved for special use (which the Christians eventually baptized for their own).

In Conclusion: Silent Recollection, its Authentic Interpretation

I conclude my article with a quote from Fr. Simoulin's excellent article, “*Attendance at Mass and Participation in the Liturgy*” (which in addition to *Mediator Dei*, I would encourage all to read), to address the often misunderstood matter of what silent recollection consists within the liturgy:

The objection is classic and is repeated unceasingly: How can these words, these chants, these changes of position, favor the silent recollection of prayer? St. Thomas has already responded to the objection [*Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, Q.84, A.2.], and one could wonder why it should be considered a distraction from prayer to sing the praises of God, or to manifest outwardly one's devotion? If singing the praises of God is not praying and praising God, then it would be necessary to raze the liturgy.

The liturgy is the *public* worship of the Church. Now, the Church praying is the priest at the altar with all the ministers and all the faithful. Thus, the liturgy is not the sum of the *personal* prayers of the faithful while on the altar the Sacred Mysteries unfold. Rather, it is the one, unanimous, common prayer of the whole Church, united to allow Christ to hear the unique voice of his Spouse, and to unite ourselves to the voice of Christ who intercedes with the Father for her. It is the “one

¹⁸ In two different sessions, in December-January 1551 and in July-September 1562. It is interesting to note that those who were against vernacular liturgical translations were also opposed to the vernacular Biblical translations for nearly identical reasons. Cf. *The Mass and Liturgical Reform*, Fr. John L. Murphy (Bruce, 1956), “Trent and Latin,” pp 306-326. For a detailed study of the Council of Trent's debate on the vernacular debate, see Jesuit's Fr. Herman A. Schmidt's *Le Concile de Trent in Liturgie et Langue Vulgaire: Le Probleme de la langue liturgique chez les premiers Reformateurs et au Concile de Trent*, published in the *Analecta Gregoriana* 53 (Rome, 1950), p 83-198, and *Apud Aedes Universitatis Gregoriana* (Rome, 1950). The formerly cited *Dynamic Equivalence*, pp 9-11 is also an interesting read on the topic.

¹⁹ “*Not expedient*.” *Dynamic Equivalence*, p 11. From the Council's XXII Session, Chapter 8: “*Although the Mass contains great instruction for the faithful people, nevertheless, it has not seemed expedient to the Fathers, that it should be every where celebrated in the vulgar tongue*.”

²⁰ Available from Preserving Christian Publications.

²¹ Burns & Oates, 1959—available from www.churchlatin.com. This is an excellent book about liturgical Latin that I wholeheartedly recommend to any serious student of Latin and its use in the Roman Church.

heart and one soul” of the Apostles realized in public prayer.

This in no way suppresses the “silent recollection of prayer.” It is a quality of private prayer, but also of liturgical prayer, during the times when the priest himself prays silently. To unite oneself to the chant of the Church, to respond to the chant or to the words of the priest, to manifest one’s attention and union by words and deeds, or to unite oneself to the silence of the priest are so many ways of praying, and all are liturgical. But to knowingly and willingly disdain to respond to the priest and unite oneself to the common prayers, positions, and chant, etc., is to shut oneself up in a personal religion (akin to a Protestant mentality) that is no longer “liturgy.”