



**Foederatio Internationalis *Una Voce***

***Positio* N. 14, PART I**

THE HOLY WEEK REFORM OF 1955, PART I:  
GENERAL COMMENTS

FEBRUARY 2013

### From the General Introduction

These papers, commissioned by the International Federation *Una Voce*, are offered to stimulate and inform debate about the 1962 Missal among Catholics ‘attached to the ancient Latin liturgical tradition’, and others interested in the liturgical renewal of the Church. They are not to be taken to imply personal or moral criticism of those today or in the past who have adopted practices or advocated reforms which are subjected to criticism. In composing these papers we adopt the working assumption that our fellow Catholics act in good will, but that nevertheless a vigorous and well-informed debate is absolutely necessary if those who act in good will are to do so in light of a proper understanding of the issues.

The authors of the papers are not named, as the papers are not the product of any one person, and also because we prefer them to be judged on the basis of their content, not their authorship.

The International Federation *Una Voce* humbly submits the opinions contained in these papers to the judgment of the Church.

### The Holy Week Reform of 1955: General Comments: Abstract

The ceremonies of Holy Week found in the 1570 Roman Missal were the product of a long and complex development, but from then until the 1950s they remained substantially unchanged. The reform of 1955 involved a systematic abbreviation of the ceremonies, a revival of some obsolete elements, the insertion of some entirely novel ones, and changing the timing of the services. Each of these aspects of the reforms can be criticised, and there are also tensions between them, and these difficulties are the first part of a case for the optional use of the 1570 ceremonies by Catholics attached to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite. An examination of the reforms service by service will be undertaken in Part II.

*Comments can be sent to*

**positio@fiuv.org**

## FIUV POSITION PAPER 14: THE HOLY WEEK REFORM OF 1955, PART I: GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The liturgical books of 1962 include the Holy Week ceremonies as reformed in 1955. This reform has proved to be controversial, and there is a widespread desire among those attached to the Extraordinary Form that the earlier form of these rites, contained in the *Missale Romanum* of 1945, which is for practical purposes that of the Tridentine Missal of 1570, be allowed for optional use. We have no desire to impose upon anyone in this matter, however, and in particular we do not wish to add to the great practical difficulties presented, outside a monastery, seminary, or well-resourced parish dedicated to the Extraordinary Form, of celebrating Holy Week in full.
2. This paper, in its two parts, has the modest purpose of arguing that the case for the 1955 Reform is not irrefutable: rather, there is enough to be said for the 1570 services to acknowledge them as representing, in Pope Benedict XVI's words, 'riches which have grown up in the Church's life and prayer', which should be allowed some space in the Church's continuing liturgical life.<sup>1</sup> In this paper we wish to draw attention to some general, problematic, features of the 1955 reform; in part II we will examine the individual services in a little more detail.

### The Motivation for the 1955 Reform

3. The motivation of the reform was the characteristic desire of the Liturgical Movement,<sup>2</sup> that the Church's liturgical riches be experienced by greater numbers of the Faithful,<sup>3</sup> the focus of whose devotion had shifted to paraliturgical services (see appendix).
4. The limited musical resources, and the limited availability of clergy, prevented many small or even medium-sized parishes from presenting the services with the splendour which would be ideal.<sup>4</sup> It would be too simple, however, to say that they were entirely neglected by the Faithful prior to the 1950s.
5. First, Catholics were under an obligation to attend the principal services of the Triduum until 1642.<sup>5</sup>
6. Secondly, there are a number of indications that at least some of the ceremonies and liturgical ideas caught the popular imagination. The 'Creeping to the Cross' on Good

---

<sup>1</sup> We wish to leave to one side, in this paper, the question of the Prayer for the Jews in the Good Friday Liturgy, which was not changed in 1955, but was changed in 1962 and again in 2007. This does not affect the comparison of the merits of the 1570 and 1955 versions of the Holy Week ceremonies.

<sup>2</sup> See *Positio 2: Liturgical Piety and Participation*

<sup>3</sup> The Sacred Congregation for Rites decree *Maxima redemptionis nostrae mysteria* (1955) lamented the celebration of the Sacred Triduum 'by clerics alone, in an almost deserted church'.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XIII's *Memoriale Rituum* of 1725 sets out the rites and what is needed to perform them in small parochial churches, where there would not be additional sacred ministers.

<sup>5</sup> The change was made by Pope Urban VIII, in the Apostolic Constitution *Universa per Orbem* (1642).

Friday, for example, described with enthusiasm by William Langland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> was apparently well attended in France in 1915 when witnessed by the English Poet Wilfred Owen.<sup>7</sup> Again, there were a number of paraliturgical devotions which referred closely to the liturgy of Holy Week, notably the Easter Sepulchre, where the Blessed Sacrament was reposed on Good Friday in Medieval England,<sup>8</sup> and in some parts of Europe (notably Germany and Poland) until the Second Vatican Council. Finally, Bl. Ildefonso Schuster notes the popular devotion to particles of the candles of the reed (the *triplex candela coniuncta*, or trikirion) used in the Easter Vigil, in Italy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> (Paraliturgical devotions are considered again in the Appendix.)

7. Thirdly, the liturgy of Holy Week was attended in full, with great edification, not only by religious, but at Holy Week retreats for the Faithful in monasteries.<sup>10</sup> For those attending these popular events, such as the novelist Evelyn Waugh, this was an intense spiritual experience, and Waugh wrote that the reforms marred them.<sup>11</sup> The ceremonies were certainly not in vain if they fed the spiritual lives and liturgical imaginations of some Catholics.

---

<sup>6</sup> It was suppressed after the English Reformation only with great difficulty. Duffy quotes Edmund Grindal, Queen Elizabeth's second Archbishop of Canterbury, complaining about the continuing devotion: *ibid.* p29

<sup>7</sup> Owen left a record in his poem 'Maundy Thursday': the title reflecting his liturgical ignorance. He describes the veneration of the Cross by the men, the women, and the children of the parish. It seems likely he witnessed the service at Mérignac near Bordeaux, where he was staying with a French family. See *The Poems of Wilfrid Owen* edited by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) pxxiii and p86.

<sup>8</sup> See Eamon Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) pp31-37.

<sup>9</sup> 'Even in our own days, in many parts of Italy, the people still have a great devotion for the particles, no longer of the Paschal candles, but of the tapers of the *Lumen Christi*, which they enclose in little bags of silk and hang round the necks of the children.' Bl. Ildefonso Schuster *The Sacramentary (Liber Sacramentorum): historical and liturgical notes on the Roman Missal* (English Edition; London: Burns Oates, 1925) Vol. II p286

<sup>10</sup> Such retreats continue, in fact, to take place, both in monasteries devoted to the Extraordinary Form, notably in France, and in monasteries using the Ordinary Form.

<sup>11</sup> Writing in *The Spectator* in 1962, Waugh wrote: 'During the last few years we have experienced the triumph of the 'liturgists' in the new arrangement of the services for the end of Holy Week and for Easter. For centuries these had been enriched by devotions which were dear to the laity—the anticipation of the morning office of Tenebrae, the vigil at the Altar of Repose, the Mass of the Presanctified. It was not how the Christians of the second century observed the season. It was the organic growth of the needs of the people. Not all Catholics were able to avail themselves of the services but hundreds did, going to live in or near the monastic houses and making an annual retreat which began with Tenebrae on Wednesday afternoon and ended about midday on Saturday with the anticipated Easter Mass. During those three days time was conveniently apportioned between the rites of the Church and the discourses of the priest taking the retreat, with little temptation to distraction. Now nothing happens before Thursday evening. All Friday morning is empty. There is an hour or so in church on Friday afternoon. The Easter Mass is sung at midnight to a weary congregation who are constrained to 'renew their baptismal vows' in the vernacular and later repair to bed. The significance of Easter as a feast of dawn is quite lost, as is the unique character of Christmas as the Holy Night. I have noticed in the monastery I frequent a marked falling-off in the number of retreatants since the innovations or, as the liturgists prefer to call them, the restorations. It may well be that these services are nearer to the practice of primitive Christianity, but the Church rejoices in the development of dogma; why does it not also admit the development of liturgy?' See Scott Reid, ed., *A Bitter Trial: Evelyn Waugh and John Carmel Cardinal Heenan on the liturgical changes* (London: St Austin Press, 1996) pp24-25

## The Methodology of the 1955 Reform

8. The reformers favoured earlier and simpler, over later, versions of rites,<sup>12</sup> despite the condemnation of antiquarianism only a few years earlier by Pope Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*,<sup>13</sup> and the inevitable limitations of evidence and scholarship.<sup>14</sup> But the reformers simultaneously added historically unprecedented elements, which were thought likely to appeal to the people, or to emphasise a theological point, such as the Renewal of Baptismal Promises in the Easter Vigil, or the carrying of the Paschal Candle in procession. The former was condemned by the liturgical scholar Dom Bernard Capelle, despite his association with the movement for reform.<sup>15</sup> The objective tradition, the liturgy as it has in fact come down to us, as complex and seemingly illogical as any great work of art, can be damaged by both archaeological and innovative tendencies.
9. The reform tended to reduce the length of the ceremonies, most notably reducing the number of readings used in the Easter Vigil.<sup>16</sup> Again, there were simplifications, such as the abolition of the folded chasuble, an ancient feature of the Roman liturgy in penitential seasons. However, new things were added which were thought to be of pastoral value, such as the reception of Communion on Good Friday, and efforts were made to emphasise certain favoured features, such the Palm Sunday procession.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> As well as some examples mentioned below the final *Miserere* in the Office of Tenebrae, which had been used continuously since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was lost in the reform for being 'late', and duplicating an earlier recitation. This *Miserere* was the inspiration for one of the most well-known pieces of sacred music in the Western repertoire, Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere*, composed in the 1630s.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) 61: 'The liturgy of the early ages is most certainly worthy of all veneration. But ancient usage must not be esteemed more suitable and proper, either in its own right or in its significance for later times and new situations, on the simple ground that it carries the savour and aroma of antiquity. The more recent liturgical rites likewise deserve reverence and respect. They, too, owe their inspiration to the Holy Spirit, who assists the Church in every age even to the consummation of the world. They are equally the resources used by the majestic Spouse of Jesus Christ to promote and procure the sanctity of man.' ('Utique vetustae aetatis Liturgia veneratione procul dubio digna est; verumtamen vetus usus, non ideo dumtaxat quod antiquitatem sapit ac redolet, aptior ac melior existimandus est vel in semet ipso, vel ad consequentia tempora novasque rerum condiciones quod attinet. Recentiores etiam liturgici ritus reverentia observantiaque digni sunt, quoniam Spiritus Sancti afflatu, qui quovis tempore Ecclesiae adest ad consummationem usque saeculorum (cfr. *Matth.* 28, 20), orti sunt; suntque iidem pariter opes, quibus inclita Iesu Christi Sponsa utitur ad hominum sanctitatem excitandam procurandamque.')

<sup>14</sup> For example, in the 1955 reform the colour of the vestments during the Blessing of Palms was changed from violet to red, because it was believed that this was the authentic, ancient, colour. In fact violet had anciently been used in the Roman Rite, and the change had no justification. See Philip Goddard *Festa Paschalia: A history of the Holy Week liturgy in the Roman Rite* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2011) p285, note 9.

<sup>15</sup> He wrote: 'There is no need for the introduction of this innovation... To ensure that the task of reforming the liturgy achieves its intended object, it is necessary that it be informed by the desire to return in a wise and discreet manner to its purer origins. It would therefore be highly inopportune to introduce rites which are not only not approved by long tradition, but are entirely novel. It is particularly intolerable when the liturgies into which they are introduced are the most ancient and sacred.' Quoted in English translation by Goddard *op. cit.* p284, and in the original Latin by Alcuin Reid *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p176, note 103.

<sup>16</sup> Other examples include the abolition of the Asperges, Preparatory Prayers, and Last Gospel, and the *Missa sicca* at the blessing of palms, on Palm Sunday; the Mass of the Presanctified was also heavily cut down. The Psalm Iudica (Ps 42) was removed from the Preparatory Prayers during Passion Week and Holy Week. Cardinal Antonelli, who was in charge of the reform, explained that one of the goals was 'to abbreviate': see Reid *Organic Development* p173 and note 87, quoting Giampietro Cardinal Ferdinando Antonelli pp24-6.

<sup>17</sup> 'Major changes were made to the rite of blessing the palms and the subsequent procession. These changes were driven by the desire to transfer the focus of the rite from the former to the latter.' Goddard, *op. cit.* p266.

10. This raises the general difficulty that, having shortened and simplified the liturgy to draw people into a fuller appreciation of the liturgy, there is less to appreciate. Similarly, replacing ancient and perhaps mysterious ceremonies, with newly invented easy-to-understand ones, risks losing forever the chance for people, including liturgical scholars, to grow in understanding. It also assumes, falsely, that somewhat opaque symbolism has less effect on the Faithful.<sup>18</sup> It is better, as many members of the Liturgical Movement argued, to educate the Faithful to appreciate the riches of the liturgy in their entirety.<sup>19</sup> It might be added also, that the Faithful need not necessarily be expected to attend every service every year.

### The Timing of the Ceremonies

11. One of the most striking changes made by the reform was to the timing of the services. In the 1570 Missal the services are to be celebrated at the standard time for Lenten Masses, after None (9am). In origin the Easter Vigil had been celebrated during the night,<sup>20</sup> the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday in the evening (in memory of the Last Supper),<sup>21</sup> and the Mass of the Presanctified, on Good Friday, at the time of the Crucifixion, in the afternoon.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Tenebrae (Matins and Lauds), originally celebrated during the night (starting at midnight), came to be celebrated on the evening of the day before. The process of anticipation, complete by 1570, began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The tendency to celebrate the Holy Week services earlier in the day can be also be seen in the Eastern Churches.
12. In assessing this, it should be noted, first, that the celebration of these services, outside the ideal conditions of a monastery, seminary or parish dedicated to the Extraordinary Form, frequently has to make do with times when churches and sacred ministers are available, and it would be a pastoral mistake, at the present juncture, to be too prescriptive.

---

<sup>18</sup> 'The notion that the more intelligible the sign, the more effectively it will enter the lives of the faithful is implausible to the sociological imagination. ...a certain opacity is essential to symbolic action in the sociologists' account...' Fr Aidan Nichols *Looking at the Liturgy: a critical view of its contemporary form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996) p61.

<sup>19</sup> A representative of this attitude was Fr Hans Anscar Reinhold, who wrote as follows in 1947: 'The modern Liturgical Movement is obedient, orthodox, modest. The *first thing* it demands is that all of us, we ourselves, perform the Liturgy as it is in the books and conform to it. Self reform and perfection. In the *second place* we expect this to open our eyes to niceties and rediscoveries that will transform our thinking into greater dogmatic correctness, proportionality and joy. The *third thing* will be to see the Liturgy restored to simplicity and originality. Only in the *fourth degree* will we prostrate ourselves at the feet of the Holy Father and ask for reforms.' Quoted in Reid, *Organic Development* p141-2.

<sup>20</sup> Or, as it is sometimes described, the 'morning', which is to say the early morning before dawn.

<sup>21</sup> In Rome, the Pope would celebrate a single Mass at noon, in which he blessed the oils, while in the rest of the city (whose liturgy is preserved in the Old Gelasian Sacramentary) three Masses were celebrated: a morning Mass with the reconciliation of penitents, a chrisom Mass at noon, and an evening *Missa in Coena Domini ad sero*. However it was the papal ('Gregorian') books which were adopted, with additions, in Alcuin's reform of the Frankish liturgy under Charlemagne, and it was this reform which found its way back to Rome in later centuries. So the Maundy Thursday Mass of the 1570 Missal derives ultimately from the noon Mass of the Pope, rather than the ancient evening Mass of the day. See Goddard p134.

<sup>22</sup> In the Old Gelasian tradition, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, it is celebrated at 3pm; in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Pontifical it is celebrated at noon, which is given in the 1474 *Missale Romanum*; celebration in the morning developed later. See Goddard pp173.

13. Secondly, it must be observed that the tendency to anticipate the Vigil has strongly reasserted itself since 1970. The reality is that for many Catholics, particularly those with small children or those (such as many attached to the Extraordinary Form) who have to travel any distance to attend the service, a service starting at Midnight and ending after 2am is neither attractive nor practicable. It is also usually regarded as incompatible with attendance at the Mass of Easter Day. A late-night vigil is clearly not ideal from the point of view of encouraging attendance at as many of these important services as possible.
14. Thirdly, Tenebrae are very moving liturgies of the night or evening, with a highly effective use of the symbolism of light and darkness. In the reform they are to be celebrated in the mornings, to make way for the principal services;<sup>23</sup> this is little short of a disaster.
15. Finally, as with so much in the history of the liturgy, symbolic meaning came to be attached to the timing of the liturgies, and this symbolism can still speak to us today. As Pope Benedict XVI has written:
- The day on which I was baptized, as I said, was Holy Saturday. At that time [1927], the practice was still that of anticipating Easter Vigil on the morning, after which the gloom of Holy Saturday continued, without the Alleluia. It seems to me that this peculiar paradox, this peculiar anticipation of the light on a dark day, could be almost an image of history in our time. On one hand, there is still the silence of God and of his absence, but, in the Resurrection of Christ, there is already the anticipation of God's 'yes', and we live based on this anticipation, and, through the silence of God, we feel his words, and, through the darkness of his absence, we foresee his light. The anticipation of the Resurrection amidst a history that goes on is the strength that shows us the path and helps us move forward.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

16. The reform, which began experimentally in 1951<sup>25</sup> and concluded in 1955,<sup>26</sup> led to an increased interest in the ceremonies, and higher attendance. To what extent this resulted from the novelty of the reformed services, the vigorous promotion of them by the advocates of the reform, and by bishops and priests urged to publicise them, or the change of the timing of the services, is impossible to say, and the long-term effects were prevented from manifesting themselves by the new wave of liturgical changes which began in 1964. There were reports of declining numbers at Easter Vigil as early as 1955,<sup>27</sup> and a number of

---

<sup>23</sup> Paschal Matins, which was celebrated on Holy Saturday evening at the first Office of Easter, was abolished altogether: on this see *Positio 14 Part II*, §12.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Benedict XVI: *Homily, Thanksgiving birthday Mass*, April 16, 2012

<sup>25</sup> The experimental Easter Vigil, in what was substantially the form approved in 1955, was allowed at the new, nocturnal, times from 1951 by the decree *Dominicae Resurrectionis vigiliam*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1951, not long before Easter itself. Reid notes that the Ordo, necessary for the reformed service, was published less than a month before Easter, which fell that year on 25<sup>th</sup> March. (Reid *Organic Development* p172, note 80)

<sup>26</sup> The *Ordo Hebdomadae Sanctae Instauratus*, commenting officially on the changes, was published in 1956, although the texts had been available earlier. The final version of the reformed Holy Week contained some revisions to the experimental Easter Vigil and reformed versions of the other ceremonies of Holy Week, and made all of these obligatory.

<sup>27</sup> Fr John Coyne, Rector of the Seminary of Oscott, England, commented in 1955: 'Now that the novelty is wearing off, parishes in many areas report dwindling congregations. In many places, also, the Easter Vigil congregation has never approached in numbers that of the Christmas midnight Mass. Nor has the new service

bishops complained of the practical difficulties of the Vigil,<sup>28</sup> notably the exhaustion of clergy who were expected to hear confessions all day and start a lengthy and demanding service late at night.<sup>29</sup> The final and obligatory reform of 1955 was vigorously opposed by some bishops, notably Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin and Cardinal Spellman of New York.<sup>30</sup>

17. The controversy the reform caused at the time has not gone away. Its effect on individual services will be examined in Part II.

---

always been adopted where we might most have expected to find it. In Westminster Cathedral, for example, it was not in use till 1955. Saint Peter's, Rome, has still to abandon the morning service.' Quoted in Reid, *Organic Development* p222. See also Evelyn Waugh's report of declining numbers at the Downside Easter retreat, writing in 1962, quoted in note 11.

<sup>28</sup> Bishops sending in negative reports about the experimental use of the reformed Holy Week services include Mgr Felice Bonomini, Bishop of Como; Cardinal Siri, Archbishop of Genoa; and Mgr Cornelio Cuccarollo, Archbishop of Otranto. See Reid *ibid.* p222, note 270.

<sup>29</sup> This problem was noted by the official report into the experiment, a *Positio* composed by Cardinal Antonelli and published by the Sacred Congregation for Rites in 1955. See Reid *ibid.* pp221-2, and note 269.

<sup>30</sup> See Reid *ibid.* p231.



## Appendix: the Triduum and Paraliturgical Devotions

Members of the Liturgical Movement liked to emphasise the superiority of the liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, over paraliturgical ('popular') devotions. This concern is reflected in the words of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 13:

13. Popular devotions of the Christian people are to be highly commended, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church, above all when they are ordered by the Apostolic See.

Devotions proper to individual Churches also have a special dignity if they are undertaken by mandate of the bishops according to customs or books lawfully approved.

But these devotions should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them.<sup>31</sup>

Before the 1955 reform, there were a number of paraliturgical devotions which, while varying from place to place, were often very well attended, and customarily took place in the time left between the services. Thus, the time on Maundy Thursday, between Mass in the morning and Tenebrae in the evening, was used for watching by the Altar of Repose. Out of this grew the practice, particularly in cities, of the 'Seven Altars': visiting seven Altars of Repose, to pray before each. On Good Friday, again, the time between the Mass of the Presanctified in the morning, and Tenebrae in the evening, was used for the very widespread devotion of the Stations of the Cross. This was celebrated publicly, with a degree of solemnity (led by a priest vested in a surplice and perhaps cope, and perhaps accompanied by acolytes with a Processional Cross and torches). In addition, in some places there was a series of sermons on the Seven Last Words. Linking the liturgy of Good Friday with the Easter Vigil was the practise, widespread in the Middle Ages, and still practiced in some countries, of the Easter Sepulchre.

These devotions both harmonise with the liturgical season and derive from the liturgy; they are therefore highly commendable, and their popularity is evidence of their importance for the spiritual lives of the Faithful. It might be regrettable that relatively few attended the Mass of the Presanctified before 1955, but it is not regrettable that so many attended the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. They were not mutually exclusive.

One of the effects of the changes to the timings of the Triduum liturgies was that the times traditionally given over to these devotions on the afternoons of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday ceased to be available. While it would theoretically be possible to celebrate them at other times, these are not so appropriate or convenient, and in practice the devotions disappeared from Catholic life, a great impoverishment of Catholic spirituality.

---

<sup>31</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 13: 'Pia populi christiani exercitia, dummodo legibus et normis Ecclesiae conformia sint, valde commendantur, praesertim cum de mandato Apostolicae Sedis fiunt.

'Speciali quoque dignitate gaudent sacra Ecclesiarum particularium exercitia, quae de mandato Episcoporum celebrantur, secundum consuetudines aut libros legitime approbatos.

'Ita vero, ratione habita temporum liturgicorum, eadem exercitia ordinentur oportet, ut sacrae Liturgiae congruant, ab ea quodammodo deriventur, ad eam populum manuducant, utpote quae natura sua iisdem longe antecellat.'