

Book Review

The Genius of the Roman Rite: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives on Catholic Liturgy. Ed. Uwe Michael Lang. Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2010. ISBN 978-1-59525-031-5. 255+xii pp. \$24 US.

Roman Catholic proponents of a reform of the liturgical reform have attracted some scholars skillful enough to shine a light upon liturgical history yet passionate enough to dim the contributions of the Second Vatican Council. One needs to look no further than the title of this book, which borrows from Edmund Bishop's early 20th-century essay. The "Roman Rite" in question has to refer to the pre-conciliar missal, because the contents of this volume attribute scant genius to the Missal of Paul VI. Consequently, those who believe the liturgical reforms of Vatican II were catastrophic will take heart in these pages; those convinced by the beauty of today's mass will feel affronted. These scholarly efforts ride along the waves of emotion, so they draw the emotions of the reader into their wake.

Editor Uwe Michael Lang has compiled the proceedings of the 2006 International Colloquium of the *Centre International d'Études Liturgiques* – International Centre for Liturgical Studies, held in Merton College, Oxford. In general the research is good and the arguments are provocative. Christina Dondi's deft handling of the scarce material concerning liturgies of medieval military religious orders is a case in point. Similarly, Claude Barthe makes a sincere appeal to recover the mystical meaning of the mass through a judicious use of allegory. The argument has merit because there are biblical and liturgical antecedents, and academic research into the literal sense of the liturgy is essential but incomplete. Yet even the best research in an article like Gabriel Díaz Patri's "Poetry in the Latin Liturgy," which offers positively illuminating information on the development of hymnody in the Roman liturgy, cannot refrain from lamenting the developments that evolved after the Council.

At times the research of an entire article crumbles under the weight of anger. Eamon Duffy's opening salvo, "Benedict XVI and the Liturgy," purports to lead a tour of the papal mind. Duffy says the pope's unease with the direction of liturgical change "is often perceived as part of a general rejection on his part of the conciliar reforms, or, to put it more crudely, as part of a more general reactionary repudiation of the Council" (1). This statement concerns a perception, but the article does nothing to reject it. Instead, Duffy feeds this perception, oblivious to the simple choice Pope Benedict makes every day when he celebrates mass from the Missal of Paul VI. The result is a desperate essay about Duffy's preferences projected onto the under-footnoted mind of Benedict XVI.

Most offensive is Alcuin Reid's dismissal of the postconciliar eucharistic prayers as "cuckoo eggs" (212). It is hard to imagine that Antonio Cardinal Cañizares Llovera,

Archbishop J. Augustine Di Noia, and Francis Cardinal George, whose endorsements fill the back cover of this book, would agree.

There are editorial problems – missing words and misspellings, for example. Inconsistencies mar several arguments. Duffy asks whether calling the mass a meal reduces its sacrificial character (9), but uses the place settings of the Last Supper to shore up his argument for celebrating mass *ad orientem* (18). He complains that the Missal of Paul VI was “invented by scholars and imposed by arbitrary and irresponsible papal command” (20), but hopes that scholarship such as his will inspire a different command from the present pontiff. László Dobszay singles out the “questionable harmonization” in the cycle of responsorial psalms (87-88), but praises the spiritual and psychological fruit of a preconiliar mass where the theme of the gospel cohered with that of the introit (92).

By the end, the book introduces the reader to the minds of a select circle of Catholics who respect the validity of the Missal of Paul VI, but want it thoroughly re-edited. Readers looking for scholarly insights into the liturgy – its incorporation of poetry, the formulation of its antiphons, the origins of its calendar, the beauty of its imagery, the place of popular piety – will find all that in here. They just may need to bring something else into the room with this collection of writers – the patience to endure some groaning in the quest for understanding.

“Religious Books: Heat, but also some light.” *The Tablet* 264/8845 (22 May 2010):24.