

A Commentary on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.

Developed under the Auspices of the Catholic Academy of Liturgy and Cosponsored by the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Ed. Edward Foley, Nathan D. Mitchell, and Joanne M. Pierce. A Pueblo Book. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007. Pages xvi+502. Hardbound, \$59.95. ISBN 978-0-8146-6017-1.

In its first publication, the Catholic Academy of Liturgy has produced not only an immensely useful book, but one that creates a new genre. Styled after commentaries of the bible and the Code of Canon Law, this work offers a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which surveys the theology and celebration of the Roman Catholic mass. The missal's third edition was promulgated in Latin in 2002, together with a revised General Instruction. Although the missal is still being translated, the Instruction is available in English, and it will have renewed importance when the vernacular translation of the entire missal is released. The Catholic Academy of Liturgy was formed about seven years ago among Catholics schooled professionally in liturgy. Twenty-four members contributed to this commentary. (In the interests of disclosure, the reviewer is a member of this Academy, though not a contributor to this book.)

The *Commentary* is perfectly designed to suit its purpose. A typical page divides into three uneven parts. At the top one sees the full text of the General Instruction in English and Latin in parallel columns. The middle of the page holds the commentary. Footnotes anchor the bottom. More than a commentary on the Instruction, this book offers critique, pointing out its strengths and inconsistencies.

All this is preceded by three excellent essays. Nathan D. Mitchell and John F. Baldovin give a historical overview of the class of liturgical documents to which the Instruction belongs. Kevin Seasoltz's explanation of liturgy and ecclesiastical law reminds the reader that the Instruction has more to do with theology than legislation. David N. Power and Catherine Vincie have composed rich theological and pastoral reflections. The editors have controlled this material to prepare the reader for what lies ahead, while avoiding the mire of extraneous matters.

Some strong sections brace the body of the book, starting with Margaret Mary Keleher's analysis of the Preamble, where she nuances the continuous line from the Councils of Trent and Vatican II: "It would be a mistake to read the Instruction as claiming that the Church's whole tradition of eucharistic prayers supports a particular understanding of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist" (78).

Readers will most frequently thumb through Edward Foley's commentary on the structure, elements and parts of the mass. His analysis is always clear, insightful and practical. Here are remarks on prayer as a divinely initiated dialogue (122), the psalm as an expression of Christ's presence in Word and *communio* (147), the presence of Christ in all proclamations of the Word (150), the theology of eucharistic prayer (170-173), the constitutive quality of the congregational parts of the eucharistic prayer (174), the difficulties involved with the word "consecration" (131), the correlation between verbs

and ministers in the receiving/taking/administration of communion (188-189), and the treatment of capitalizations in terms such as “Sacrifice” and “banquet” (163).

Martin Connell and Sharon McMillan’s entry on the different forms of celebrating mass is likewise strong, especially its treatment of the communion rite (258-261). Noteworthy is the observation that the English translation of paragraph 161 “shows more of a prejudice for receiving on the tongue than the Latin text” does (258).

The practice of concelebration has its admirers and detractors, but it is rare to find as balanced a presentation as the introduction by Gilbert Ostdiek and Andrew Ciferni (279-281), which treats the history and contemporary expression of the practice.

Mary Schaefer and Joanne M. Pierce offer sagacious insights on some general norms for all forms of mass. Their fine treatment of extraordinary ministers of holy communion (344-345) is another section that needed good commentary and received it.

Still, some parts could have been improved. There is no overview of the entire General Instruction, explaining or critiquing the flow of its chapters. Occasionally one finds a remark about the character of the Instruction (e.g., its “penchant for . . . precision” [266] and its separation of clergy and laity [passim]), but one wishes these had been gathered into an introduction. The commentary makes important references to ancillary liturgical documents, but very little is made of the Directory for Masses with Children. Several important paragraphs from the Instruction get surprisingly little treatment, for example the prohibition against priests removing or changing anything in the mass (GIRM 24), the centrality of the freestanding altar (299 and 303), and the placement of the tabernacle (375).

A good index is always welcome, but this one seems almost prodigal. For example, under the heading “Rite(s)”, there are over 300 references. Is anyone really going to search through them?

In a work of such detail, there will be instances when the writers miss the mark. The *Kyrie* is used in form B of the Act of Penitence, in spite of words to the contrary (143). The repeated objections to the use of the word “offertory” (beginning at 124) are well-intentioned but miss its association with a musical piece. Arguments about the antiphon at the preparation of the gifts (190) ignore that there is only one such antiphon in the entire missal. GIRM 32’s request that musical instruments be silent throughout the eucharistic prayer is old and probably pertains to organ masses (120). Priests who cannot tolerate alcohol may indeed use *mustum* (390), but the same is true of the laity with permission of the Ordinary. The statement that the presider is required to say the prayer after communion from the chair (260) conflicts with the rubrics in GIRM 165. A proposed retranslation for the title of one subheading (“The Choice of the Mass and Its Parts”) correctly notes one inadequacy, but creates two more (405). And one can quibble over the spelling of “Exultet” (459 and 464) and using the neologism “eucharistized” (passim) as a substitute for “consecrated”.

This is a reference book that contemporary and future generations will need in order to understand the General Instruction as well as its implementation. It is a landmark achievement by some of the best Catholic liturgical minds of our day.

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