



Critical Reflections on the Bugnini Liturgy: The Divine Office

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In the most splendid periods of the liturgy, Christian communities devoted the same reverence and attention to the Office as to the Mass. The Eucharist undoubtedly surpasses any other service in its ontologic meaning and its effects in the order of divine grace. But in terms of psychological and catechetical influence, the Office has greater potential.

I. LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE ROMAN OFFICE

1. The Roots

Although the Office is rooted in the Old Testament and the religious customs of mankind as a whole, what we call the Office in the strict sense of the word was born not earlier than the IIIrd/IVth centuries, when older elements of Christian piety were integrated into a logical structure. Consideration of these constituent elements helps us to understand better the problems associated with the Office today.

The first constitutive element was the *continuous praying of psalms*. It was “continuous” in two respects: it was permanent and never-silent prayer, and its essence was to pray them in the numerical order of the Psalter. The Psalter in its Christian understanding (which is more than a purely scientific explanation and goes back to Christ Himself) became the most important, indeed, we can say the *only* prayer-book of Christianity. The psalms were prayed privately on different occasions by layfolk and clerics, and the Psalter functioned as the “libretto” of chant during Divine Service. Though individual psalms could be selected to consecrate different feasts,

times, items of everyday life and feelings of the heart, yet the totality of Christian life along with its manifold, sometimes contrasting motives found its prayerful acceptance and expression first and foremost in the continuous psalmody. When the Psalter is prayed in its order, the faithful accept the holy words from the hand of God, without selection, in the order given by the Will of God Who works through the changing events of history. The *kathisma* in the Office of the Eastern Churches or the continuous psalmody of the Ambrosian Office manifest the universality of this practise and its spiritual significance. Usages differed in one respect: concerning the length of time in which the complete Psalter had to be prayed. St Benedict regarded one week as optimal: it is a more moderate measure which lessens the burthen of “the full Psalter daily” advocated by the severe Desert Fathers, whilst defending the monks’ life against laxity.

The second component of the Office is the sanctification of time by *observance of holy hours* of the day. For man, thrown into time and subjected to erosion by time, the set hours and times, the fixed observation of hours is really a healing. Since man turned first to God, morning and evening were regarded always as the most compelling, or as it were, obligatory hours for prayer. There is nothing else that makes us more conscious of the frailty of our existence and our dependence upon our Creator, than the birth and fall of daylight. These hours were the cornerstones of the liturgical day for the Old Testament as well.

Then the night was added to these two, as the time most suitable for contacting supranatural realities. Christ and the Apostles admonished us repeatedly to keep the vigils. Their observance might vary according to different conditions and the zeal of individuals, but the Church as a whole maintains, with a common obligation, at least the preparatory vigils before great feasts and, following an ancient tradition, to commemorate the dead.

The third component originated in the wish to keep the rule of “pray without ceasing,” *sine intermissione orate*, even during the day’s work. When we turn to God, even briefly, but periodically, we raise all our actions and our entire life into the sphere of God’s (and Christ’s) power. As the masters of the first centuries taught, “to pray without ceasing is to keep the fixed hours.”

The Hours of the Office celebrated with the participation of the lay people differed from the continuous psalmody of the clerics in three respects:

- i. Instead of praying the entire Psalter, psalms were selected that fit the occasion and remain more or less stable, such as e.g. 50, 62, 148/50 and the canticle *Benedictus* for the morning, or psalm ii8 for the daytime; psalm 140 was regarded as the best for sunset, psalms 4, 90 and 133 for the night. The essence of the Hour was to recite these selected psalms.
- ii. Whilst the continuous psalmody was regarded as the task chiefly of an individual devotee or of the monastic community, the Office of the Hours was celebrated regularly together with the people. Ancient Christian texts say that he who is absent from the morning and evening prayers, not only harms himself but also truncates the Body of Christ.

iii. The presence of the congregation inspired the inclusion of blessings, orations, processions with lights, incense in the service and the solemn rites performed by the clergy (dialogues, sermons, invocations).

It is this service which the scholarly literature calls the “Cathedral Office.” To avoid misunderstanding, we will refer to it by the “modern” term “folk office” or Parish Office. The Office, in the broad sense of the word, was prayed in the Christian church from the very dawn of her existence. Paul and Silas sang psalms in prison with full voice so that other people could hear it (Acts 16/23). Strictly speaking, the Office was born when the constituent elements mentioned above had been integrated and the continuous psalmody organically built into the regular “folk office.” This historical process was influenced by the foundation of urban monasticism : the monks moved into the cities and became officiants of the “pastoral” liturgy, and consequently of the Parish Office. Simultaneously, after the persecutions ceased, the parish churches were provided with a staff of priests, deacons, acolytes, lectors and psalmists, and thus were enabled to sing the full office day by day, and to pray it not only with the people (*cum populo*), but also for the people (*pro populo*).

The coalescence of the components was mutually successful. The continuous psalmody gave stable order and tranquillity to the Office and fulfilled the obligation of periodically praying the full Psalter. The “parish office” contributed a stable framework to the composite, made possible the recitation of the outstanding psalms more frequently, added influential elements and rituals to the psalmody and increased its beauty and efficacy. The well-balanced or, we might say, classic arrangement of the Office achieved in the IVth and Vth centuries, was uniform over the entire Christian world in its essential motives whilst the actual applications and solutions varied according to the great ecclesiastical provinces.

2. The formation of the Roman Office

Of the many varieties of Office, perhaps the most mature construction is the proper Office of Rome. its elements were ready by the IVth, or at latest, the Vth century. When Benedict of Nursia gave an Office to his monks at the beginning of the VIth century, he did no more than to adapt the Roman Office to the living conditions of the monastery. This IVth/Vth century form of the Roman Office has been augmented during subsequent centuries, giving birth to a great family of various related Offices, but in its essence it remained unchanged up to the XXth century. When we speak of the “Roman Office,” it is this 1500-year-old structure which is meant, and not one individual form of it (such as the Tridentine Office), but rather the totality expressed in the rites of dioceses and religious orders. In this sense it can be said that the Roman Office originated in the IVth or Vth century, was mortally wounded around 1900, and ceased to exist in 1970.

We shall now describe briefly the essential features of this Roman Office, chiefly referring to its “secular” form used in the dioceses.

2.1. The “naturalness” of the Roman Office arises from an organic development that did not

conceal the traces of historical difference between components and the different roots of Hours, in spite of the necessary unification. Lauds and Vespers, Vigils and the group of daytime “Little Hours” differ perceptibly in length, structure and atmosphere.

The Vigil (“Mattins”) consists of longer psalmody and reading, in alternation, in accord with the contemplative character of the lengthy night watch. The Hour is preceded by the Invitatory, which does not belong to the start of the astronomical day, but rather is a proportionate introduction of the longer Hour, and at the same time the overture to the liturgical day which commences with the Vigil.

Lauds and Vespers are the most “liturgical” hours their predominant element is praise; the ceremonial elements of the ancient “folk office” survived chiefly in these two hours. Their perfect construction, with a progression from the Old Testament psalms through the reading of the Bible up to the hymn, the New Testament canticle and the Collect, is not only marked by a perfect dramatical and psychological sense, but expresses the theological idea of salvation proceeding from prophecy to fulfillment, from Creation (psalms) through Redemption (hymn, canticle) to Sanctification (collect).

The structure of the Little Hours corresponds to their function. The psalms are short and always the same so that they can be prayed without a book during a brief pause in our daily activity. St Benedict went one step further when he adapted them still more to the life of his monks (which more closely resembles the life of a working man today, than does the clerical society). Terce, Sext and Nones with their short and stable texts easily prayed in four or five minutes, constitute the ‘most modern’ element of the ancient Roman Office, ‘modern’ here meaning that which is fitting to the life style of man today.

And also Compline, for blessing the nightly rest, is short and unchanged. Its form corresponds to the need of calming down the soul at the close of day, and conducting the praying person over to restful repose. (One can feel this spirit very well in a Benedictine monastery where the community each evening recites by heart in the dark church psalms 4,90 and 133.)

The different character of the Hours is manifest also in the varying placement of the hymn: in the “quiet” Hours (Vigil, Little Hours) the hymn begins the celebration, whilst in the “dynamic” Hours it stands before the canticle.

In sum, the first legacy of the Roman Office is the preservation of the different characters of the Hours, according to their origin and distinctive structure.

2.2 The character of the Hours depends chiefly upon the fundamental constitutive element of the Office, i.e the distribution of psalms. The Roman Office masterfully combined the two principles of distribution.

Selected psalm(section)s are to be prayed in the Little Hours, the same each day : the *divisiones* of psalm ii8 which is the psalm placing all human activity permanently under the dominance of

God's law. St Benedict replaced this psalm on the weekdays by the nine "gradual" psalms (119/27) which express the basic motives of the Christian life with great variety in texts shorter than the sections of psalm 118. (Whilst in the original form of the Roman Office each of the Little Hours contained 3 x 16 = 48 psalm verses, the Benedictine series gives 24 verses for Terce, 18 at Sext and 20 in Nones.) Neither the psalms of Prime nor Compline vary.

Three of the Lauds psalms are unchanged, too, and two psalms change according to the given day of the week. The unchanging psalms go back to a very ancient, as it were obligatory practise: psalm 50 (on feasts: 92), the morning paired psalms 62 + 66, and the truly "laudatory" psalms 148+149+150, connected. (The connexion of these three derives from the Old Testament, and they refer also to the Resurrection.)

Between two of the unchanging psalms, two others are inserted the "proper psalm" of the day in second place (99, 5, 42, 64, 89, 142, 91 beginning with Sunday; each of them refers to the light and morning!); and the proper canticle of the day in the fourth position. According to St Benedict's statement, the selection of the canticles is part of an old Roman tradition. The continuous psalmody dominates the Vigil and Vespers: psalms 1/108 are assigned to the night Hour and 109/47 to the Vespers; the psalms chosen for the other Hours are skipped over in the continuous psalmody.

Night Vigil	Lauds	Prime	Little Hours	Vespers	Compline
1-108	50, X, 62+66, X, 148-150	117, 118/1-11	T:118/III-V, S:VI-VII, N:IX-XI	109-147	4, (30/1-6), 90, 133

- Notes : X = psalm/canticle of Lauds, changing daily
- The 11 (double-)sections marked in psalm 118 each contains 16 verses
- In St Benedict's system psalm 118 is divided into 22 single sections of 8 verses each. Sections 1-4 are prayed at Prime, the others three by three in the Little Hours of Sunday and Monday. From Tuesday to Sunday the nine gradual psalms are recited daily: Terce 119-121, Sext 122-124, Nones 125-127.
- The Benedictine (monastic) Compline omits verses 1/6 of psalm 30.

In sum : the second legacy of the Roman Office is a reasonable combination of the two ancient systems resulting in a clear, practical and meaningful distribution of the psalms which is easy to grasp and remember.

2.3 In the distribution of the psalms, and also in other parts of the Office there prevails a traditional numerosity (which sometimes inspired mystical explanations). It is easy to recognise a proportionate relationship between the structure of the Hour and the number of its psalms (3

psalms in the Little Hours, 5 psalms at Lauds and Vespers, 12 psalms in the Vigil). As patristic writers already observed, the number of nighttime psalms equals the sum of the psalms in the four daytime Hours. The Vigil of the Sunday and festal Office is regulated by another principle : the smooth alternation of psalmody and reading sections is governed by the number three : the Vigil has three nocturns, each with three psalms (having their own antiphons) and three lections (with their responsories). Each nocturn is provided with lections of different types (Biblical, patristic or hagiographic and homiletic texts). The reading in each nocturn is also divided into three by responsories, whereby attention remains focussed during the relatively longer texts.

In sum, the third legacy of the Roman Office is a tranquil and harmonious numerosity (which contrasts with the irregular number of psalms in e.g. the Ambrosian Office), related to the structure of the given Hour. It is true that the total duration of the psalmody is regulated by the number of psalms instead of their length; so the time required for reciting the daily portion became quite variable. To eliminate this anomaly, the Roman monastic Office divided the longer psalms into two parts.

2.4 The Rule of St Benedict attests that readings from the Bible and from the Church Fathers were part of the Vigil office. In early times the selection was left to the head of the local community, who had to examine very carefully the author's orthodoxy. With the passage of time, the "pericopes" were gradually regulated by customary lists, later by lectionaries. The situation was different in the case of the Biblical readings. In the second phase of development, not only the appropriate readings of the feasts but also the continuous reading of Holy Writ (*scriptura occurrens*) was fixed in its broad outlines. The books of the Torah were to be read from Septuagesima Sunday, then the book of Jeremias (Passiontide) and the New Testament (Eastertide; except the Gospels and St Paul's letters) interrupted the succession, which resumes after Whitsuntide with the books of Kings, Wisdom (August), Job, Tobias, Judith, Esther (September) and the Macchabees (October). In November followed the Prophets, and in Advent Isaias. The series closed with St Paul's letters after Epiphany. The *scriptura occurrens* did not mean reading the complete books, but rather in selecting the passages a certain freedom was again allowed to local decisions.

In sum : the fourth legacy of the Roman Office is the principle governing the distribution of Office lections during the year. The arrangement of the readings, in turn, influenced the composition of certain chants such as responsories or antiphons.

2.5 We know from St Benedict's Rule that the great feasts had their proper psalms, antiphons and responsories and it can be taken for granted that the *per annum* part of the year also possessed a fixed repertory of antiphons and responsories. The collection containing this repertory was later called "antiphonary" or *antiphonarium officii*.

With some simplification, the antiphonary can be divided into three layers or levels:

-- to the *first* belong the antiphons and responsories of the weekly Psalter and of the great ancient feasts. Their texts are mostly taken from the psalms, or the biography of the saint celebrated.

These constitute a homogeneous group in musical respects too, and they can be dated back with great probability to the first centuries or decades of the Roman Office. This group was preserved more or less intact during the centuries which followed, and only the use of the psalmic responsories was reduced to a limited period of the year (from Epiphany to Septuagesima). This repertory and its liturgical arrangement is practically a common possession of all churches of the Roman Rite.

-- The *second* layer is the fruit of the full development of the liturgical year. Here belong the prophetic antiphons and responsories of Advent, the non-psalmic pieces on the great feasts, the antiphons to the Lenten Gospels; the final addition might be the “great antiphons” of the Sundays which take their text from the Gospel of the day. The majority of these pieces may originate in the period between the VIth and IXth centuries. They are somewhat lengthier than the pieces of the first level, but they follow the old style of the chant. This repertory, too, is a common property of the Western Church, though differences can be noted among the local churches in respect of the selection and distribution of individual pieces.

-- The third layer is a response to the addition of new elements between the IXth and XVth centuries. The growing number of saints’ feasts inspired new antiphons and new responsories. Their uneven acceptance makes for considerable differences between the local traditions.

In sum : the fifth legacy of the Roman Office is the Roman Antiphonary, primarily its first and second layers.

The Roman Office is essentially one and the same for all families of *Christian rites*. Examples of common features include the use of Psalters, the characteristics of the Hours, the combination of the continuous and selected psalmody, the liturgical genres of the Office (antiphon, responsory) and the assignment of certain preeminent psalms.

Within this framework the Roman Office belongs to the family of *Latin* (non-Roman, in great part vanished) *Liturgies*. Among them, too, we again find common elements such as the inclusion of the Magnificat in Vespers, for instance, or the selection of the Old Testament canticles, etc.

Narrowing the circle, we arrive at the *Roman Office* which is an individual local branch of this common tradition, indeed perhaps the most outstanding specimen of the great local liturgies. When Rome extended her evangelising missions to the new populations which had settled down during the Great Migration of Nations, the missionaries took with them their liturgical experience and their liturgical books in the new churches, and everywhere they began to sing the Office accordingly. The wide diffusion of the Roman rite in Europe reacted upon the old territories of Christianity and most of the local liturgies disappeared (with the exception of the Ambrosian rite).

The Office of Rome thus became *the Office of all Western Christendom*.

3. *The Roman Office in the Middle Ages*

In every important point, the structure of the Roman Office remained unchanged from the IVth or Vth until the beginning of the XXth century ! The repertory grew, the number of antiphons and responsories increased during the centuries : if we base our count upon an old repertory containing the *per annum* antiphons and the responsories taken from the Psalter, the psalmic pieces of some great solemnities and the common of saints, then the size can be estimated at not more than four or five hundred antiphons and two or three hundred responsories in St Benedict's time. In contrast, the content of an average mediaeval antiphoner includes 2000 antiphons and 1000 responsories or more. More and more new pieces, later entire cycles ("*historiae*") were composed to beautify the new feasts and elevate the cult of saints celebrated earlier only by a common office.

The more ancient a piece is, the more prominently it figures as part of the *common Roman heritage* of Europe. The younger items appear as local additions to the basic antiphonary inspired, of course, by the old tradition. Both layers have their own value, though their prestige is of different rank.

I have already pointed out that this common heritage did not exclude the formation of new offices by the local churches, or the appearance of characteristic variations for local use. These variations caused no change in the structure of the Hours and the distribution of psalms; legal differences involved the distribution and practical use of the antiphonary, completed with some additions. These provided the diocesan offices with a special "colour," and those who celebrated the office in choir, might feel themselves at home both in the Roman rite as a whole (transmitted to him through his proper church), and in his "home" tradition deserving of special respect and emotional adherence.

Some of the religious orders used the Benedictine variant of the Roman liturgy, with more or less local additions and re-arrangement. On the other hand, orders founded later as associations of the secular clergy adopted the Office of their settlement (e.g the Augustinian canons) or of the place of their foundation (e.g. the Dominicans), so that both came to be regarded as their proper Office, the expression of their identity. If it is true to say, *Chorus facit monachum* (Office in common makes the monk), then we may complete the proverb thus: *Hic chorus facit hunc monachum* (The order's own Office shapes the self-identity of the monk).

Within this multiplicity, a special role was reserved for the "curial office," i.e. the form prayed by the clergy of the papal court and its offices. This derived from an Old Italian branch of the Roman Office and had been slightly simplified according to the needs of the members of the Curia. Those elements linked to the liturgy of cathedrals and parish churches were omitted here as superfluous for priests without pastoral duties. A version of this *officium Romanae Curiae* became the proper Office of the Franciscans.

The most important change that influenced the place of the Office in the life of the Church, was the spread of "private Office." Although as early as the second half of the first millenium the

congregations had ceased chanting the Office regularly, they nevertheless participated, at least passively, in the Vespers of Sundays and feastdays. As far as the priests were concerned, the Office remained communal sung praise of God, at least in principle. In practise, however, more and more priests fulfilled their obligation regularly by mute reading of the “breviary.” This change did not influence the Office itself. The dialogues, responsorial forms and genres connected with singing also survived in the Office read silently, and no Office texts were produced without a melody. But private reading of the breviary gradually became the normal practise. The service with its dramatic structure, performance in song and lay participation, was transformed into a meditative prayer to nourish priestly spirituality. At the end of the Middle Ages the notated books were replaced by (printed) breviaries without notation.

4. Reform liturgies and Trent

Toward the close of the Middle Ages the Office was almost submerged by appendices and new items, which made its reform seem to be a pressing need. The reforms proposed tended in 14 opposite directions.

Some wished to modernise the Office by opening it wide to “reasonable” proposals and ideas inspired by the spirit of *humanism*. This tendency actually meant an open break with the Roman tradition. One of these experiments won widespread popularity: the new Breviary published under the name of Cardinal Quignonez made the Office more “rational,” eliminated a great part of the traditional repertory, made the Hours quite uniform (with three psalms in each), and removed the chanted portions. The result was a short, “geometrically” arranged breviary, destined for reading. Since this breviary drastically shortened the *pensum* of the priest’s daily prayer, it spread rapidly.

Another way was to “purify” the Office from its “ballast” and restore it in the spirit of the traditions. This approach found support partly in the results of the “humanistic” reforms, partly in the liturgical innovations of Protestantism that made clear (in a negative way) how closely the cult is connected with the *depositum fidei*, the preservation of pure faith.

The Council of Trent rejected the reform Offices, including the Quignonez breviary. Those who were obliged to pray the Office might either return to their traditional local rite, or accept the new Roman Tridentine liturgical books planned for subsequent publication.

The new Breviary published by authority of St Pius V was a slightly modified version of the Officium Romanae Curiae, which was the supposedly “authentic” form of the Roman tradition. The mediaeval additions and the legacy of Karolingian or post-Karolingian times (formerly in wide use throughout much of Europe) were in great part omitted and the Tridentine Breviary, like its predecessor, the Curial one, also eliminated the “pastoral” elements taken over from the tradition of the ancient Roman basilicas.

In my opinion, when speaking of the Tridentine rite we should avoid two misleading views. The rite of Trent cannot be hailed as the only way to return to the authentic Roman liturgy. The

Roman rite was rich in different traditions, and they all represented the same “Roman” rite. So, “Rome” does not equal “Trent.”

But on the other hand, Trent was not something basically different from the traditional Roman liturgy; it was not a XVIth-century innovation. The Tridentine liturgy was identical in all essential elements with Roman tradition already 1000 or more years old when the Tridentine rite emerged.

The first error is much less harmful, but both arise from the same misinformation or (in the second case) a purposefully tendentious falsification.¹

The breviary of Trent was not declared obligatory: the local rites of long tradition could be maintained in the future. In spite of this “right of immemorial tradition” they have been abandoned almost everywhere and the Tridentine office was accepted universally.

The wave of reforms then subsided, and only unessential changes have been made during the three subsequent centuries. Nevertheless, the “rationalistic” reform endeavours did not cease entirely in this period. In France, almost every diocese had its own Neo-Gallican Office, though their destructive influence (which was sharply attacked 150 years ago by Dom Prosper Gueranger) remained limited to a narrow sphere.

The process, begun in the Middle Ages, of making the normal form of the Office (i.e. sung in choir) an exception, and the exceptional form (i.e. private breviary of the priest) the norm, intensified during this time. The consequences affected even the most recent events negatively. Even so, the singing of the Office remained part of the daily service of some monasteries and cathedrals. Vespers celebrated along with the congregation survived in some regions (the peasant population of Hungarian villages sang Vespers in Latin or in Hungarian until the end of the XXth century 1); and the liturgical movement also aimed to educate the lay folk to sing Vespers (of course, in Latin). However, the Office remained something to be read by the clergy, an obligation of the priestly life, in the best cases nourishing spirituality, in worse cases the *onus diei*, the day’s burden.

And precisely this attitude led, at the beginning of the XXth century, to the dissolution of the centuries-old structure of the Roman Office. The cry became ever more insistent to diminish the obligations of the priests burdened by pastoral work. Since the custom of praying the entire Psalter each week remained valid, the basic principles of psalm distribution (the combination of selected psalms and continuous psalmody) -- in other words, the most powerful factor of the Roman Office -- had to be abandoned. A great advantage (and in the eyes of the reformers: a great disadvantage) of the old system was the daily repetition of some psalms. This repetition was the remnant of the ancient “folk office” and was justified by theological, practical, psychological and spiritual arguments. The new Roman Breviary published under the name of St Pius X moved

¹ On this, see my studies in *Sacred Music* 126/1 (Spring 1999)4/22.

more than half of the 12 nocturnal psalms into the Little Hours, and replaced the stable psalms of Lauds by others which change daily. So the pensum of Mattins has been considerably diminished. The longer psalms were divided, the daily portions became more or less equal. The number of psalms (or psalm sections) became always nine, even on weekdays, instead of the traditional twelve. This new distribution reduced the daily burden without giving up the principle of “the entire Psalter in one week.” But it was a victory of questionable value....

The first loss was that the order of the antiphons was disturbed. Many new antiphons were needed because of the new position of psalms and psalm sections. The new texts (often worded in a style different from the old ones) required new melodies.

The old system of selected psalms disappeared. The daytime Hours received different psalms for each day, and these Hours became nearly as long as Vespers. The Little Hours lost their original character and meaning. Lauds was despoiled of its stable psalmody which was based on solid theological and historical grounds. Practically, 35 psalms entered this Hour, in a puzzling order. Compline also lost its stability, and with it the close contact between its psalms and the nighttime.

The practise of continuous psalmody also ceased. About half of the “nocturnal psalms” (1/108) disappeared from the Vigil, being transferred over to an “empty” Hour of the same or another day. In respect of the number of the psalms, the Vigil became the same on weekdays and on feasts, with a difference only in the number of lections.

The greatest damage was the change the new Breviary inflicted upon the mind of the priests. The generations that grew up with this Breviary have lost their sense of and feeling for the life-inspired order of the Office. They have forgotten what a Little Hour is for, or what they did think about it, contradicted what they actually prayed. The emotional relationship of the soul to individual psalms that was the result of an association between the given text and the Hour in which it is prayed, was disrupted after the psalm was expelled from its place.

This was the first time in a long history when the clergy began to feel that we could “freely” dispose of the 1500 years of Roman tradition. And thus they became, as it were, prepared for the rejection of the Roman liturgy as a whole.

II. THE LITURGIA HORARUM AND ITS CRITICS

The reforms of Pius X diminished considerably the “burden of the day.” But for the clergy, this was not enough. They found the hour or hour and a half required for the daily Office, too long. The main point of further reforms requested from Vatican II was once again a radical shortening of the Office. A further goal was a kind of “rationalisation” in the spirit of Quignonez and the Neo-Gallican “reform” Breviaries. Many other changes (sometimes correct, otherwise wanton) completed the package of new reforms. With the Liturgia Horarum in hand, one is frequently inclined to ask what is the “true spiritual benefit” of the given modification, a benefit that the Liturgy Constitution defined as the chief criterion of any change.

The Council dealt with the Office mainly from the theological, spiritual and disciplinary points of view, but some principles for its reorganisation were also enunciated. A new Latin version of the Psalms was desired (practically, a return from the *Pianum* to the *Vulgata*), along with a restoration of the hymns (return from the ‘modernised’ version of the XVIIth century to the original mediaeval texts). The Liturgy Constitution abolished Prime, conceded a choice of only one of the daytime Little Hours, and stipulated a new distribution of the Psalter over a longer (undefined) period instead of its weekly recitation. Practical realisation of these proposals was left to a Committee to be established subsequently.

This Committee, under the leadership of Msgr. Bugnini (practically following his will, or, if the reports are true, a will from outside the Church), did not reform the Roman Office, but created a *new* Breviary. It was sent to the bishops’ conferences, seeking their opinion. But in fact, this was only a formality, because insufficient time was allowed for a thorough analysis, the clergy were unprepared for a well-founded response, and the Committee simply decided upon the changes, whatever the reply that came from ‘outside’.

I summarise the most important innovations and add some remarks. The third chapter will discuss a solution of the problems.

The character of the Hours

The Vigil Office (“Mattins”) was transformed into an “Hour of Readings” with three psalms and two long lections. This Hour can be read at any time of the day.

The structure of Lauds and Vespers has been changed : the hymn was placed at the start, the number of psalms is reduced to three, the last psalm of Vespers has been replaced by a NT canticle. At the close of these Hours the oration (*collecta*) is preceded by invocations modelled after the *oratio fidelium*.

The Hour of Prime has been abolished.

The Little Hours are replaced by one single Hour (*Hora Media*) which can be said at any time of the day. In the time of the other two Little Hours some psalms are listed for *ad libitum* prayer. Compline begins with the hymn and has only one psalm.

The Invitatory was transferred from Mattins to whichever Hour is prayed first on the kalendar day.

There is no difference between the structure of the Office on Sunday, feastsdays, and weekdays. The daily portion of psalms (or: psalm divisions) is reduced from forty to eleven. The difference between the Hours became blurred. Each Hour consists of three psalms. The lengthier, contemplative psalmody of the Vigil, the solemn psalms of Lauds and Vespers, and the short psalms of the Little Hours (which fit so well the rhythm of daily activity), have all been

equalised, following the new rule of praying more or less the same portion on each day and in each Hour.

The disposition of the Hours became uniform: they begin with the hymn; only the inclusion of the canticle (or of two long readings in the “Hour of Readings”) differentiates the Minor and Major Hours.

This motive of uniformity derives not from the organism of the Office itself, but from the mentality of its producers who planned a “reading-praying” book rather than a vivid and dramatic choir-Office. Perhaps they even had no personal experience of the characteristic differences between the Hours caused by their proper effect and construction. The typical organic differences of the old Office moulded the individual Hours (as well as the entire day) into a well-shaped arch, whilst the new order simply multiplied the Hours.

As noted previously, the Vigil has been transformed into the “Hour of Readings” that can be read at any time of the day. Here, the aim was purely practical : the priest can thus read the Hour wherever he finds place for it in his daily schedule. An essential element of liturgical spirituality has thereby been eliminated. The theology and mystical aspects of the Vigil had been explained frequently, and with profound contemplation, by the masters of the spiritual life. No doubt, its observance demanded some self-denial from the participants, but compensated them by the special spiritual blessing of just this time of day. The length of the Vigil -- the lengthier psalmody with its contemplative atmosphere and the quiet reading in the silence of evening or night -- corresponded well with this spirit. The “Hour of Reading” is based not on the tradition of Christian prayer but on modern techniques of time-saving.

The Invitatory, too, fell victim to misunderstanding. The genuine motive of this responsorial psalm is not the start of our daytime, but it is rather a solemn overture to the *liturgical* day, even if it is prayed on the eve or in the night.

This view is not contradicted by the fact that Mattins begins with the Invitatory also on the days having First *Vespers*. These were not an original element of the Roman Office, but an addition to the daily liturgy, part of the preparation (vigil-day) rather than of the solemnity.

For the construction of the “Hora Media” the starting point was the Breviary of St Pius X and not the original structure of the Roman Office. This Breviary transformed the Little Hours into lengthier services and shattered the very function of the Little Hours by the use of changing psalms. Whilst the authentic “Lithe” Hours could be easily included in the course of the day and served well the spiritual intention of these Hours (which was to interrupt at regular intervals the profane activity with prayers, and thus sanctify the ‘holy times’), it was precisely the modern Breviary which made them “burdensome.” The Liturgia Horarum should have returned to the original idea, viz, the practise of *horae minores*; instead it reduced the three Hours to one. So it created another *hora major* (or, to use its own term: an hour of medium size), and eliminated the traditional spirituality of the *horae minores*.

Another misunderstanding underlies the abolition of Prime. It was falsely stated that the Roman Office duplicates morning prayer (Lauds -- Prime). But in fact the character, function and content of the two hours is totally different. Lauds greets a day in the history of salvation, a new day of the kosmos, the Creation and the rise of Easter anew on every day. Prime (concluded by the praxis-oriented *officium capituli*) sanctified the working day of the labouring man. Or, we might say that the importance of Lauds lies in its dogmatic and communal nature, whilst Prime affects the moral and private sphere.

The new distribution of psalms

The fading of the Hour's character is a consequence of the diminution of daily psalmody and of the new distribution of psalms.

The reforms at the beginning of the XXth century abandoned in great part the 1500-year-old system and its basic principles of distribution. Two generations of priests have grown up without any personal experience of the Roman psalmic order, and the majority of them simply did not know about its existence. The Liturgia Horarum went further -- with a more radical resolution -- down the path opened 70 years ago.

According to the new distribution, the psalter is to be prayed through over a period of four weeks. If one multiplies this number of days by the number eleven (the daily portion of psalms), one gets 308, which is a little more than double the whole psalter. The difference arises not from the repetition of certain psalms, but from the wide-ranging practise of dividing psalms into sections.

With very minor exceptions, none of the psalms recurs during the four-week period. In other words, the use of certain fixed or "stable" psalms (dating back to the ancient "folk office"), has been abandoned. But the other great principle, continuous psalmody, has also been rejected. An essential feature of the old practise survived the reform of St Pius X: psalms 109/144 were assigned to Vespers, and traces of the continuous psalmody could be discerned, though scattered amongst Mattins and the Little Hours. The basic norm for distribution in the LH is the equal length of psalm portions, and the psalms/divisions have been assigned in a random (dis)order amongst the 112 Hours of 28 days (except for a very few points of structural consideration). It could hardly be otherwise, since it is impossible to attribute proper "content" to the psalm selection over 28 days and the many Hours within that period. After all, the Liturgy too has its own psychological laws, such as the measure of cyclic change the human mind is able to follow and grasp : a period of 28 times 5 is surely beyond normal perceptibility.

The old system represented an ideal equilibrium : the stability of the Little Hours fitted to the conditions of the working day; the fixed psalms of Lauds expressed day by day the chief motives of the Hour: (Ps 50= penitence at the beginning of the day, Ps 62 awaking to God; Pss 148/50 = solemn praise of God Who created and redeemed us); one psalm of Lauds (referring to light and morning) and the canticle changed with the day of the week, in coordination with a natural and

biblical period of time (the week), resulting in a cyclic recurrence very much within the grasp of the human mind. The remainder of the psalter was not forced to follow intellectual schemes difficult of comprehension, but was left to follow its own biblical sequence.

An innovation of the Liturgia Horarum is the insertion of a NT canticle into Vespers. The innovation might be an analogy with the VT canticle of Lauds, and was supported by the view of some scholars who speculate that some passages of the NT contain the traces of an old Christian hymnody. This hypothesis is not generally accepted, and in fact, paragraphs from St Paul's letters or from the Apocalypse sound rather strange when transformed into a psalm. Moreover, this innovation has fractured the logic of the Hour, which involved an ascent from the VT psalms (understood, of course, in Christian interpretation) through the hymn to the Magnificat.

The new distribution of psalms resulted in a net loss, and contributed much to the change of character of the Hours. The association between a given Hour and its proper psalms was clear and natural in the Roman Office, where the stable psalms in fact identified some Hours, whilst the continuous psalmody was linked with the Vigil and Vespers, forming two groups each (i.e. Pss 1/108 and 109/47) for the two Hours. This order now disappeared without being replaced by another. If the violent rearrangement of the psalmic order in the LH was accomplished according to some motive, it remains a mystery even for the person at prayer.

It is very difficult to discern the "true spiritual benefit" which motivated the new distribution. The only discernible intention, it seems, was to reduce the number of psalms and arrange them into equal portions.

The repertory of the antiphons

The rearrangement of the psalms made the Antiphonale Romanum unuseable. A great many new antiphons had to be created, and many of the existing ones transferred to a new location.

In the traditional Roman system, not all the psalms received a separate antiphon. For instance, the psalms of the Little Hours were sung under one antiphon (*antiphona sola*); the psalms of the weekday Vigils were kept together in pairs. Some rites made frequent use of the *antiphona so/a* for the nocturns and/or First Vespers. This practise reasonably reduced the repertory and also affected the character of the Hours. The *antiphona so/a* in the Little Hours corresponded to the brevity and simple structure of these Hours, whilst the solemnity of the *horae majores* was emphasised by separate antiphons for each psalm. In other cases, the importance of an antiphon was stressed by its "sole" position.

The practise of the *antiphona sola* may help the congregation in the Parish Office in our own day, too, since only one piece needs to be learnt and the entire series of psalms can be sung in the same mode.

The use of the *antiphona sola* has been eliminated from the LH. Other changes were caused by the new system of Gospel pericopes in the Sunday Masses. A number of Benedictus and

Magnificat antiphons take their texts from the daily Gospel. In consequence of the new system, a good many antiphons had to be transferred to another day and the situation is further complicated by the three-year Gospel cycle. If the three *antiphonae majores* (to the Benedictus and the two Magnificats) would be taken from the Gospel, we would need three times three antiphons for the three years. The solution of the LH is rather strange : the antiphona major of the First Vespers fits with the Gospel of the A-year, of Lauds with the B-year and of Second Vespers with the C-year. So two of the three antiphons remain unsung each year.

The authors of the LH created a great number of new antiphons. They defined new texts for many days and feasts, neither better nor worse but different from the Roman Antiphonary. A great number of antiphons of the Antiphonale Romanum remained unused, whilst many new pieces appeared, lacking any tune. This means that the Antiphonale Romanum cannot be adapted. One may gather some pieces from its pages, but they will be mingled with the multitude of new texts.

The three layers of the Antiphonale Romanum (viz, the ancient core material, the primary additions and the mediaeval additions) were more or less separated liturgically, and each liturgical section (the psalter, de tempore, commune, old saints of the sanctorale, mediaeval offices of saints) was provided with a (stylistically) rather homogeneous set of antiphons. Now, the elements -- items different in style, age and origin -- are mixed throughout in all the sections, which are consequently less homogeneous.

The new antiphons are *texts* singled out of the Bible by liturgical experts. And this observation leads to a fundamental criticism.

The Roman Office was the fixation of a service celebrated in choir, shaped and polished in living practise. Its antiphons were *chants* jointly produced by reflexion, liturgical tradition and musical creativity. The typological aspect of the ancient antiphons vividly reflects a realistic singing practise.

In contrast, the Liturgia Horarum is a book to be read, conceived at a writing desk. The “chants” are not chants in reality, but have been conceived in the same way. The Liturgia Horarum is the first Office Book in the life of the Church, which lacks tunes. Consequently, the LH is not an instrument for the restoration of liturgical life, but it rather prolongs the decadence of recent centuries and continues the process which already changed the Office, earlier sung in common, into a book to be read by priests.

Thirty years elapsed for its publication, and the promise of a notated Roman Antiphonary still awaits fulfillment. Music experts had to realise that there are no tunes to the chants of the Liturgia Horarum and only two possibilities exist : either compose new melodies for hundreds of new texts, or select antiphons from the old Antiphonary, with the consequence that the “libretto” of the Office (Liturgia Horarum) and its sung variants, will be different. This situation is something quite new and strange in the two-thousand-year history of the Church. The question which anyone and everyone is entitled to ask, is : which one is now the Office of the Roman Church,

the “read” book or the “sung” one?

This crucial question went unanswered in actual practise, where either people use the Liber Usualis for the sung Office, or local composers fabricate compositions to vernacular texts, or -- in the majority of cases -- the Office is not sung at all.

The responsories

Responsorial chant is the most ancient manner of performing psalms, for it antedates antiphonal psalmody. The word responsory refers to the reply of the congregation to the psalmist, a refrain enabling the congregation to join in the psalmody. Later, when members of the community became familiar with entire psalms, the antiphonal chant prevailed and responsorial psalmody was restricted to one genre (the Invitatory), whilst a new genre developed from the old way of performance : the post-lectional responsory with (only one or) few verses.

The very expression “responsory” means that the congregation responds to the psalmist, and not that the responsory reflects upon the thoughts explained in the reading. The genre itself was originally a type of psalm-singing without any link to the lection. Furthermore, after it found a new position following the reading, it was motivated by a psychological rather than an intellectual demand : to allow room for the emotions after the verbal communication, to offer an opportunity for quiet contemplation after the intellectual activity.

In fact, the meaning of the responsory texts is only loosely (if at all) connected with the message of the reading. In the beginning, a collection of psalmic responsories was used, and the pieces were used according to a purely numerical order. The Roman Office maintained this ancient repertory in the weeks after Epiphany: after each reading a selected psalm is sung as a responsory, and these pieces are arranged according to the days of the week. This is probably the form of Office referred to by St Benedict. Later, the responsories might be related to the feast, to the season or to the *scriptura occurrens* (the book of the Bible read in a given month) *as a whole*, but even then not to the individual lections. The responsories taken from the scriptura occurrens displaced the old psalmic responsories in the major part of the year, and their function was to deepen the impact of the biblical book. The responsory helped the community maintain contact with the given book. A clear sign of this is the fact that the responsories “de Regibus,” “de Sapientia,” “de Job” etc. were sung during the given month even after the readings taken from other (non-biblical) books, as for instance in the 2nd and 3rd nocturn.

It was only in the XXth century that scholars of liturgy began to suppose a close connexion between reading and subsequent responsory. And just as this hypothesis was being refuted by historical studies, pragmatist liturgists set about realising the fictitious past in the future, creating responsories corresponding to each reading. Since the two readings on the 365 days of the year amount to more than 700 lections and themes, hundreds of new texts had to be constructed, largely lacking any liturgical or musical precedents.

And so the fate of this genre has been sealed. The new responsories can be read or recited, but they do not thereby become ‘responsories’ in a liturgico-musical sense. The melismatic style of

the true responsories is quite foreign to the fabricators of today's liturgy, and it is rather difficult to adapt the long texts to the models of the short recitative responsories.

Two paths remain open: either to stop singing the responsory, or to replace the responsories of the LH with the traditional repertory. But the latter has lost its point of reference. The responsories of the *scriptura occurrens* were coordinated with the distribution of the Bible over the year. The location of many responsories was fixed by the assignment of the books of Moses to the period after Septuagesima; of Acts, the Apocalypse and the Catholic Epistles to Eastertide; of the books of Kings to the weeks following Pentecost; of Kings and Wisdom to August; of Job, Tobias, Judith and Esther to September, of Machabees to October (and November); of the Prophets to November, Isaias to December, of Isaias and Paul to the weeks following Epiphany. The Liturgia Horarum abolished this order of biblical readings, assigning two- or three-week periods for one textual unit, and shifting about among the VT and NT books. Since the authors strove for a very close link between the given reading and the responsory, the patristic readings also were given newly conceived responsories. It is rare that an appropriate piece could be found in the traditional repertory.

Is the Liturgia Horarum part of the Roman Liturgy?

Leaving aside many other details, we address the question : what is the place of the Liturgia Horarum within the family of Roman Office rites?

As we have seen, the LH broke with the Roman Office at all essential points: LH abolished the characteristic structure of the Hours; modified the distribution of psalms, indeed abandoned its principles; transformed the repertory and arrangement of the Antiphonary to such an extent that now the two can hardly be identified. In stark contrast to the Roman Office, the new LH does not take as its starting point the common celebration in choir, but the private reading of the Breviary. If the Roman Office of recent centuries can be likened to the libretto of an opera without its music, the LH is an opera destined from the outset to exist without music, without public performance. In other words, it is merely a story to read.

One recalls that the Office of the great mediaeval churches varied from place to place in such a way that each diocese had to provide proper books for itself, and later print its own Breviary. Moreover, all of these differed from the "Old Roman" Antiphonary, as also the Tridentine Breviary universally accepted during the last four centuries, differed considerably from all of the previous ones. These differences imparted individual colours to the Offices of the individual dioceses and religious orders, and the participants might feel that the given Office was their own, so to speak.

But if we compare them, the differences appear non-essential. The structure of the Hours, the distribution of psalms, the repertory and assignment of the antiphonary were essentially the same everywhere, and the differences appeared in the local additions and on points which did not disturb the main features. One could say, then, that everything they have in common (i.e. 80% or more of their material) is THE Roman Rite. In other words, the Roman Rite is represented in the

universality of the particular rites. The Tridentine Office too, is a member of this family, without any difference in the essential features, even if it can be called a somewhat “puritanistic” version compared to its relatives. The Roman rite, when regarded from close up, is alive in its local traditions; looked at from a greater distance, it appears as one and the same liturgy, always and everywhere the same in the Western church from the IVth or Vth century (or earlier), in spite of the organic development and natural modifications.

This continuity refutes two false ideas. One is, that the liturgy must always be adapted to the spirit of the historical ages. Whilst that thesis may be valid for details (e.g. the devotion of the Middle Ages is reflected in the Marian Office and the daily *Officium Defunctorum*), the Office as a whole expresses the lasting elements of the faith and the cult.

The other false idea is that the Tridentine Office is a recent rite expressing the spirituality of the XVIth century, and hence outdated today. (Far be it from me, though, to assign an absolute rank and value to the Tridentine Office!) It is not the only and perhaps not the best representative of the Roman rite. But it is a member of the Roman rite, and it differs only in minor points from the tradition which had already been alive for a thousand years when Trent’s version appeared. The *Liturgia Horarum* re-uses elements from the Roman Office the way someone erecting a new building uses bricks taken from a demolished house. But the result is not the same building. The structure, material and spirit of the *Liturgia Horarum* is so far distant from the Roman Office (in the sense explained above), that it cannot be called a new version of it, or a new member of the family. Only in one sense is the *Liturgia Horarum* “Roman”: it is proposed by Rome, approved by the Pope, and we are obliged to obey. In other words, the *Liturgia Horarum*, from the legal point of view, is the presently valid Office of the Roman Church, but in terms of its content it does not belong to the category of “Roman Office.”

Where can we situate it if we search for its relatives? I think that it belongs in the group of short-lived reform Breviaries of the XVIth-XVIIIth centuries. The intention to abbreviate and “rationalise,” the uniformity of the Hours, the artificial composition instead of organic development (as required by the last Council!), the predominance of private will and creativity whilst disregarding continuous common usage, the “libretto” character: all these and many other concrete devices link the *Liturgia Horarum* to that family.

The history of the Roman Office came to an end in 1970 -- or, at least it seems so today.

III. No other way?

Could another way be found? Or, was this construction not a necessity, a requirement of this age? is it not true that the editors recognised the ‘signs of the times’?

As of today, no one has yet listed the elements of the Roman Office which were up-to-date in 500, in 1000, in 1500 and in 1890 -- but suddenly became outdated in 1960. No doubt, the Roman (in practise, the “Tridentine”) Office needed corrections, of which I mention two examples. Permission for persons ignorant of Latin to pray the Office in the vernacular, was

surely a benefit for them. And it might also be affirmed that different groups in the Church pray the Office under different conditions, thus requiring Offices of somewhat different size and structure. However, I do not think that these difficulties could be resolved without destroying the entire edifice of the Roman Office. The twofold desire of the last Council, viz, to permit innovations that “are genuinely and certainly required for the good of the Church” and to “adopt new forms which in some way grow organically from forms already existing,” could indeed be fulfilled.

It is not my task to propose solutions, nor am I authorised to advise persons responsible for the matter. But I cannot argue for the possibility of retaining the essence of the old Office whilst adapting it to the requirements of our own day, if I do not give examples of such a healthy compromise.

Office and Consuetudo

A given Office (e.g. Milanese, Byzantine, Roman) is an historically formed unit modelled and regulated by its inner proportions or interrelationships. Changes in time and space do not destroy its integrity, nor do certain variations. But inner laws do exist, and once these are transgressed, the essence and spirit of the whole is violated and the structure becomes unbalanced. In this case the resulting product should not be called by its former name, since it has become something different. The history of these Offices illustrates development, extension, modification and addition without loss of identity, and reasonable changes can be successful in our own day as well. New offices can be fabricated, too, as was done with the reform Offices of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, but if this be done, the authors should state frankly that the product is a new construction, whose value has to be measured accordingly.

The history of the liturgy offers ample evidence of praying the same Office differently in different communities following not some sort of ‘inspiration’ or capricious improvisation, but the legal ordinances and consuetudo or custom of the community. One example: the Office of the Byzantine Church preserved its identity in spite of the historical changes wrought chiefly by growth, and there can be no doubt about what the Byzantine Office is. But this does not mean that the Byzantine Office is said in its entirety by every community or even by all priests. Just because there are differing but legally permitted ways of praying the Office, these different conditions neither require nor justify radical changes in the structure of the Office. Some monasteries chant the entire Office daily in the name of and for all their brethren in a regular manner, following their venerable tradition. Other communities, monasteries and parish churches sing some of the Hours. There are permissible ways of shortening slightly the long Hours. This is possible precisely because the Office itself stands virtually untouched behind the daily local practise.

The XXth-century problems of the Roman Office would have been solved by accepting this duality between Rite and Consuetudo. The Roman Office should have been improved in some small details, but untouched in essence, with clear indication of the ways in which single communities and persons could adapt it to the individual conditions of their life. We admit that

the conditions are different in the case of a monastery, a cathedral or collegiate chapter whose primary task is to present the praise of the whole Church to God by maintaining the fulness of the cult, or a religious order in *vita activa*, of a parish church in an urban setting or in the diaspora which should have a portion of the Office (though not the whole) in its regular order of service. And conditions are again clearly different with communities of nuns or spiritual confraternities founded precisely for praying the Office. How different the living conditions of a young seminarist, an active pastor, a retired priest, a priest teaching in a university, for instance. The Office may confer a kind of regularity upon the life of a layman, but individual obligations, daily schedule, extraordinary events and also inspiration play a role in defining the chances for psalmody.

One might accommodate this multiformity by constructing a “mini-Office” for the busiest person or community and defining this Office as the “official” one, obligatory for everyone. But there is another possibility, too : the Church may propose the “maxi-Office” as the official liturgy of the Church as a whole (and prayed by the Church as a whole), whilst the individual persons and communities follow the rules of their *consuetudo* concerning the portion in which they take part. Of course it would be irreverent toward the liturgy and very harmful for the faithful if everyone followed his own will in this respect. Rules are necessary on four levels.

1. It is the responsibility of the Church to define basic principles for the individual types of communities and persons concerning the obligatory minimum, essential elements of the Hour, etc. An example of a universal rule might be that Lauds is valid if at least three of its five psalms are prayed. Or, a priest must pray the full psalter in every four weeks as a minimum. Or: all communities of religious orders *in vita activa* must pray at least Lauds and/or Vespers in choir *every day*.

2. The second level is that of the local authorities, the chapter of the diocese or the superior of a religious order. Knowing the given local conditions, the authority defines the general rules governing how the actual communities should adapt the full Office to their life.

3. The third level is the given liturgical community. A well-ordered liturgy needs the fixity of customs based on legal decisions, and recorded in a local “Consuetudinary Book” as was done for centuries. In this case a kind of *institutio liturgica* is compiled from the system of general, seasonal and exceptional orders.

The fourth level is that of the individual person (e.g. a priest praying the Office privately) who shapes and permanently re-shapes his prayer in practise following the general rules and the order of his daily schedule.

If this be done, then the church appears -- in spite of the differences and perhaps precisely because of those differences -- as an *acies bene ordinata*, a great association for praise, where everybody takes part in the same liturgy according to his own properties, completes the activity of the others and possesses the common spiritual goods acquired.

Folk office, choir office, private office

At least in principle, the Office has, of course, only one form : the one sung in the choir of a secular or monastic community.

The choir Office is of two types : the “parish Office,” viz, the regular Office prayed by the clergy and the people, and the “canonical” Office, viz, the great Office of stable ecclesiastical corporations prayed in the name of and for the whole Church.

The “parish Office” is the successor of the folk office, one of the most ancient forms of the Christian liturgy. It may be shorter and structurally simpler than the full form. Its “ordinary” elements may predominate over the changing elements (e.g. it contains one formula for the Advent Vespers instead of daily changes. One hears that Vatican II planned to edit such a “folk Office,” but it failed to come about, either for lack of time, or by leaving the task to the local churches.) Lauds and Vespers are the main Hours of the parish Office, but there the Vigil Office may regain its original function as a part of the preparation for great solemnities. The parish Office should also be the chief form for the parish priests. It would be reasonable that a priest participating in the parish Office be obliged to read only some psalms and the lections of the Vigil Office.

The “canonical” Office represents the full form of the sung Office. The chief reason for the existence of chapters and monasteries is to have communities in the Church praying the Office diligently and regularly in a solemn fashion. Since this is (in principle) the “normal” form of it, all priests and monks might be obliged to pray periodically the whole or a great part of the Office in this community. These church communities have the great honour of absorbing and maintaining the heritage of the Office to a greater extent than their brethren living the active life are able to do. The general and local rules may establish the norms for full and partial fulfillment. Though the private Office remains the most frequent form of praying the Office, it must be regarded as an exception. That means, that he who prays the Breviary privately, should be present from time to time with regular frequency in choir, to draw from the spirit of the common service, inspiration for his privately read (or sung !) Office.

Perhaps it is not necessary that every priest pray the full Office each day. But it would be still worse if the Office itself would be tailored to the capacities of the individual priests. Above and beyond the minimum required, priests should be prepared, be able and wish to pray as much as possible of the Office, even privately.

No matter what part of the Office is prayed by the individual persons and communities, the full Office remains untouched, as the prayer of the whole Church, who shares her treasure with all her children.

Which Office?

We have already mentioned the “full” or “maximum-size” Office. But: which one?

I take it as quite natural that the Roman Church should return to the Roman Office. When priests, monks or laymen of today enter that common praise, they must feel that they join a tradition of one and a half thousand years, and are not being forced to accept a liturgy barely thirty years old, constructed by a small group.

But, as I have attempted to explain, the Roman Office is not a formula printed out from the first letter to the last. It is rather a virtual reality, manifesting itself in the proper office of dioceses and religious orders. The very idea of a uniform Office was unknown prior to the Council of Trent. Moreover, Trent itself accepted all traditional Offices, though the Council's will was neglected during the realisation of its decrees. The old rites lived on for decades even after the Council, and the mediaeval orders adhered to their own Office as a liturgy which shaped and determined their own monastic identity. (And the orders which retained a degree of self-respect, maintained their precious tradition after the last Council, too.)

During the last Vatican Council one could hear much fine rhetoric about the "queen arrayed in varied splendour," i.e. the Church as representing her inner richness in the different rites. As the Council drew to a close, one heard glad tidings of restoring traditional local liturgies for special occasions. It is curious that the end result has become a uniformity in a more dictatorial way than at any other time in church history. Simultaneously there appeared the furor of local arbitrariness. He who loves the centuries-old Office of the Church is regarded as disobedient, whilst monasteries fabricating Offices for themselves are not reproached...

I think the dioceses and religious orders could be encouraged to return with legal authorisation and approval to their own offices which are in any case, multicoloured variants of one and the same Office. On the other hand, the individual innovations should be restricted to the level of consuetudo mentioned above, i.e. a definition of the way the common Office is adapted.

There is little reason to fear these "multicoloured" Offices. All of them represent the same Roman liturgy; their repertory is common in great measure, and there are not such great differences among them as to cause scandal or prevent guests from joining in prayer. In a paradoxical way, the stable rules governing the local Office can more easily prevent arbitrariness than can the cool uniformity of the *Liturgia Horarum*.

As a representative of the Roman Office, the Tridentine form would also be eligible. Moreover, it would be a good thing if the Old Roman form of the Office would also be restored in communities suitable for that task.

To dispel any suspicion of some "museal" intention, I add a second *cautela*. The restoration of the traditional Offices might also include the necessary modifications. Some of those may concern all of the Offices, others may remain within the field of a given Office. There are or may be inconveniences in the Roman rite that can be changed without any harm to the integrity of the rite. If the essential elements are preserved, one may favour some more effective changes which may help the rite to display its living power. The matter of language also falls in this category.

While we have to work diligently for the rights and better conditions of a liturgy celebrated in Latin, we admit that the essence of a rite does not depend on the language -- provided that the translation is perfectly exact.

Many friends of the Tridentine liturgy advocate its total restoration. They fail to realise that this tactic hinders its rebirth and acceptance. Moreover, the papal instruction allowing the Tridentine Mass linked the permission to the condition that it must be celebrated in Latin and that nothing be changed in it. But the Tridentine Mass -- if some small elements are modified, and celebrated either in Latin or the vernacular depending upon the circumstances -- could become a rival to the Bugnini-Mass. Or is it precisely this which must be avoided at all costs?

In sum : the restoration of the Roman Office (with any necessary 'modernisation' and canonical approbation for its traditional variants) would result in a synthesis of traditionalism and modernity, unity and variety, organic development and tactful intervention -- in full harmony with the history of liturgy.

And then, what about the *Liturgia Horarum*? I am scandalised anew each time I recall that a liturgy constructed recently is not only placed on the same level with the centuries-old tradition of the Church, but, as a newcomer, simply swept away the previous incumbent. The Bugnini-Office was imposed on the praying Church, and simultaneously the venerable Roman Office with all the values of a deliberate and organic evolution, has been discarded. I dislike the *Liturgia Horarum*. But if it already exists, perhaps it should not be prohibited (as the Council of Trent prohibited another 'reform' Breviary). Some who like it, above all recently founded communities influenced somewhat by the Enlightenment, may prefer to retain it as their proper Office, of a somewhat eccentric type. If it coexists thus with the Roman Office, then its fate can be left to the future.

The distribution of the psalms

The chief structural element of the Office is the distribution of psalms, which determines the clear outlines of the Hours and indeed, the spirituality of the whole Office. The relationship between the Office, and praying it, is decisively influenced by the double principle of distribution. The restoration of the Roman Office requires first of all the restoration and necessary renovation of the distribution of psalms.

The first principle of psalm distribution was the use of certain selected, steadily recurring psalms. Their order was logical, it worked well over the centuries, and it corresponds to the needs of the human psyche. This order is the first to be restored.

The basic principle for **Prime**, **Terce**, **Sext** and **None** is the use of short, recurring psalms, for which the Roman Office offered two systems. The older one was to pray the entire Ps ii8 in sections of 3 times 16 verses : if we number the 8-verse sections, then 1-4 are in Prime, 5-10 in Terce, 11-16 in Sext, and 17-22 in None, whilst on Sundays the sections Ps 118/1-4 were followed by the Paschal Ps 117. The other system is that of St Benedict who divided Ps ii8 into

brief 8-verse divisions corresponding to the alphabetic structure of the Hebrew Psalm, and placed these sections on Sunday and Monday: Sunday = 1-4, 5-7, 8-11, 11-13; Monday from Terce = 14-16, 17-19, 20-22. From Tuesday onward, he assigned the 'gradual' Psalms 119/127. In ~t Benedict's system there are three series, of approximately equal length, with 18-24 verses for each Hour. The three series are equally perfect and they can be used in combination. We may follow Benedict's arrangement, but it is better to allocate the two units of Ps ii8 to two Sundays, in the following way:

Prime : Ps 117 on Sundays, 118/1-4 on weekdays (see below);

Terce-Sext-None on Sunday I: 118/5-7, 8-io, 11-13.

Terce-Sext-None Sunday II: 118/14-16, 17-19, 20-22.

Terce-Sext-None weekdays : 119-121, 122-124, 125-127.

If the Little Hours are arranged in this way, there is no need of a Hora Media. Everyone should be exhorted to pray the Little Hours at their proper time. If the press of daily activity allows no time, a given Hour can simply be omitted or replaced by a *Pater noster*, following the *pia traditio* of the first Christians. Those who pray the Hour by heart, may do so with the hymn, the three short psalms and the collect or Pater noster. Such an Hour requires three or four minutes. Psalm 118 will probably be prayed from a book, but the Gradual Psalms can be said without one. Private recitation could allow freedom to alternate the three series, provided that none of them is neglected. The proper parts of the Little Hours (antiphon, capitulum, responsory, versicle, collect) have to be recorded in the Office book, but in case of necessity they can be omitted or replaced by the per annum texts.

Prime seems more problematic, not for liturgical reasons (it does not duplicate the morning prayer !), but rather on practical grounds. The man of our day arises late and runs off to work without finding time for Prime, although it is precisely the working man who prays for special blessings upon his daily work in Prime. A short Prime, with hymn, a brief psalm and an invocation, would not require more than two or three minutes, and might even be annexed to Lauds.

Communities could pray Prime at least twice a week: on Sundays to pray the Paschal psalm 117 before Mass, and on Monday offering the whole week's work to God with the short sections (1-4) of psalm ii8, which could also be distributed amongst the single weekdays.

The psalm selection of Lauds goes back to the most ancient Office traditions:

I. 50 or on Sundays and in Eastertide : 92;

II. daily psalm: 5, 42, 64, 89, 142, 91;

III.. 62 + 66;

IV. daily canticle;

V. 148-150.

Such a selection follows a psychological trajectory from penitence through longing for God to praise, and offers practical benefits. The 5-psalm form duly emphasises the first 'lynch pin' of

the day. The daily psalm leads through the week, which is a period which the mind can still comprehend. The canticles of the single days are, as witnessed by St Benedict, of old Roman origin.

Rules for adaptation may help surmount some difficulties. The joint psalms 62+66, and 148+149+150 lengthen Lauds slightly. Though in St Benedict's Office psalms 62+66 are replaced on weekdays by a changing psalm, the original assignment is a central element of the Hour from very early times, and corresponds well with its spirit. Even so, a daily alternation of the two psalms (62,66) could be conceded. Similarly the concatenation of the Lauds psalms belongs to the oldest tradition (derived perhaps from the liturgy of the Old Testament). This arrangement should remain at least for Sunday, but with the option to select one of them on the weekdays (Monday, Thursday: 148; Tuesday, Friday: 149; Wednesday, Saturday: 150).

Such a solution preserves the genuine structure of Lauds; the number of psalms exceeds that of the Little Hours, and like Vespers, takes some fifteen minutes to read, or twenty-five minutes when sung. But rules for adaptation may go further, allowing one to pray Lauds with three psalms : one of the psalms from groups I-III above should be selected, and the local consuetudinary may define the due alternation of the three.

Only the long Saturday canticle is troublesome. The *Liturgia Horarum* abbreviated this canticle to one-third its original length, but he who reads the full canticle through carefully, may observe that the full message of the text is unfolded in the long form. (Some verses, however, could be omitted.) A possible solution would be the omission of psalms 50 and 62 on Saturday and the division of the canticle into three sections:

I. Psalm 91; II-W: canticle 1-3; V: psalm 150.

The result is the same daily length for each psalm(section). The shortened form of the canticle given by the *Liturgia Horarum* can be used in the 3-psalm form.

There is no good reason to change the psalms at Compline. The Roman form (4, 30/vss 1-6, 90,133) can be retained in the full Office whilst the rules for adaptation may allow the alternation of the two possible combinations (4, 30/vss i-6, 133 or sole psalm 90).

The recurring set of selected psalms above scarcely constitutes a great problem, and yet its stability makes it easier to use. This distribution is justified not only by tradition but by psychological and liturgical reasons as well.

All the other psalms were and should be included in the continuous psalmody. The traditional 'point of division' in their succession lies between psalms 108 and 109, as in both the Roman and Ambrosian Offices.

Psalms 109-147 are to be prayed at Vespers, excepting those prayed in other Hours (117-127, 133, 142) as is foreseen in St Benedict's Office. Instead of the seven times five psalms of the

cursus saecularis, only 26 psalms remained for seven days, and if the longer psalms are subdivided (psalms 113, 135 and 138 into three, 143, 143 and i~ into two parts) we arrive at a portion which is not onerous, proportionate to the importance of the Hour and approximately equal in length to the five psalms of Lauds. The rules of adaptation (or decisions, in the case of laymen) may allow for lessening the number of psalms to three, in which case the full portion is prayed over a fortnight.

This arrangement refers to the secular cursus of the Roman Office. The monastic Office should be left untouched, with a concession for some monasteries to pray the psalms of the first Nocturn in Week One and those of the second Nocturn in Week Two. Lauds and Vespers could also be abbreviated in a fashion similar to that already described, if need be. Only the psalms of Prime (1-19) cause trouble if this Hour is omitted. In this case the psalms of Prime from Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday could be prayed at Terce, Sext and None of Saturday Week One, and the psalms from Prime on Thursday, Friday and Saturday in the same Hours on Saturday of Week Two. Sunday Prime, though, and the *officiurn capituli* should remain as they are, to bless the work of the entire week whilst preserving the memory of the Hour. And so, nothing is changed in St Benedict's Office only the rules for adaptation make a difference in various types of monasteries.

The best time for the continuous psalmody is the nocturnal Vigil, the hour of longer and quiet prayer. Here, the psalms need no 'thematic' arrangement (save, of course, for the feasts). They maintain rather a 'general' prayerful atmosphere for the participants. What is needed here, is a systematic traversal of the psalter. The rate, however, of progression might well vary, according to the life conditions of communities or private persons. A practical solution would be to articulate the psalter into snail "chapters" of three psalms or psalm divisions, omitting the passages prayed in other Hours. One exception might be the Sunday, with a series of its own selected from the most ancient series of Sunday psalms, e.g. 1, 2, 3-8, 12, 18-19, 20, 23.

These ternary sets of psalms could be managed as units and the number of such sets to be prayed in a Vigil should be established by special rules and customaries. The character of the Hour calls for a portion of psalmody longer than that of Lauds and Vespers. This portion might be either the traditional 12 psalms (made up, however, of shorter sections than previously!), or six psalms, or even three as in the *Liturgia Horarum*. Accordingly, we would pray 4 or 2 or 1 ternary set(s) and upon reaching the end of the psalter we begin da capo. In this respect, no absolute uniformity is necessary in the church. We join the process at the point the psalmody has currently reached. Moreover, if in private recitation one day had to be omitted, we can continue where we left off two days earlier. It is obvious that such flexibility must be balanced by good rules, so as to avoid the danger of laxity.

What I have outlined here, is a system more traditional but, at the same time more innovative when compared to the bureaucratic parsimony of the *Liturgia Horarum*. The full Roman Office is given into the hands of the faithful. No matter how large the portion actually prayed according to the rules, the Office whole and undiminished remains before his eyes. On the other hand, the differences in condition of life are not ignored by an egalitarianism at the lowest level. All

essential structural values of the Roman Office are preserved without overburdening the man who prays it. This “full” Roman Office invites the faithful to take the greatest part in it according to their own strength and devotion.

The character of the Hours

The distribution of psalms shapes the character of the Hours : by restoring the Roman system, the mechanical uniformity of the Hours is eliminated and their proper structure, character and ‘mood’ are regained in large part. There are, however, other details which could be taken into consideration in order to preserve the character of the Hours.

The Night Office (“Mattins”) gets its ‘vigil’ quality not from the texts to be prayed, but rather from its length. The nightly rest, the more abundant contemplation of God and *res divinae*, the eschatological expectation of final salvation: all these contribute to an experience and spiritual condition indispensable for the Christian and Christianity. There is also a very practical reason why the Night Office or Vigils is the best time for prayer at greater length : a portion of the evening or night, of our nightly rest, is then dedicated to God and to a deepened, unhurried prayer and contemplation.

To remove the ‘vigil’ character of this Hour, is a great loss indeed. Perhaps someone is unable to pray it in its due time. Perhaps not everybody will and should pray this Hour daily. It could be permitted to transfer this Hour occasionally to another different part of the day. But this remains an exceptional concession, and it counts as though the Hour were prayed during the night. No doubt, the recent name of “Mattins” (*Matutinum*, the consequence of an historical ‘slip’) is not the best for this Hour -- but neither is “Hour of Readings.” The lengthier psalmody is an equally important (if not more important) constituent of the Hour than the readings. The best policy would be to call it once again “Vigil,” which emphasises the Biblical grounds and the spirituality of the Hour.

I believe that the Invitatory should remain in its place at the beginning of the Vigil, the beginning of the liturgical day. I have already discussed my reasons, and so here I add only that there is a proportionality between the use of an Invitatory, and the size and structure of the Vigil. The importance of this introduction was respected by many mediaeval churches so strongly, that they inserted no hymn at all in this Hour!

For hundreds of years, Lauds began in many churches with a short versicle (*versus ad Laudes, versiculus sacerdotalis*). In the depths of the half-dark church, the community is called to prayer by the voice of the celebrant, announcing a leading thought of Lauds.

Some have wished to argue for the transposition of the hymn to the beginning of Lauds and Vespers by appealing to Ambrosian usage. The truth is, that the hymn in Milan comes near the end of Lauds, whilst Vespers has no hymn at all. There is, however, a solemn Lucernarium before Vespers, and this celebration contains among other chants, also the hymn of St Ambrose *Deus Creator omnium*. This kind of celebration preceding the Vespers, widely imitated, has been

introduced into the Anglican Evensong. At Rome there is no trace of such a Lucernarium, and it would be problematic to insert it in the Hour without disturbing its proportions and structure. But there can be little objection to a solemn entrance and illumination of the church, accompanied by a proper chant.

The Antiphony

A great many new antiphons and responsories (or, more properly speaking: antiphon and responsory texts) have been created for the Liturgia Horarum. Nevertheless, if the Roman Antiphony presented any difficulties, it was rather the superabundant size of the repertory. The many ecclesiastical communities which flourished in the Middle Ages, sang the Office day by day. They demanded proper chants for the many feasts, and they also were able to learn the hundreds of new chants. In recent centuries, however, the church communities felt less and less obliged to sing the Office decently, and the lack of regularity and consequent skill has rendered the participants unable to sing the whole repertory. Even where the Office was prayed in common, a large part of it was recited rather than sung. And the XXth century achieved a noteworthy goal : that 95% of the clergy has no experience at all of the Office in choir.

After the II Vatican Council the desire to pray the Office in community (and with congregational participation) arose amongst enthusiastic Catholics, but learning and/or teaching the antiphony is almost hopeless because of lack of experience. In this respect, the enlarged antiphony brings no help, but rather causes another problem.

Today, the real need is i) to preserve as well as we can the treasury of liturgical chants already in existence, and ii) to adjust actual practice to the more adverse present-day circumstances by using a more simple and limited repertory. In other words, daily pastoral practise has to return to the “minimal” Antiphony of the Vth-VIth centuries. Musical reasons also suggest such a return: whilst the ancient repertory adapted a small set of melodies to hundreds of texts, the development of the subsequent centuries resulted in the thousands of individual melodies. This dilemma could be resolved only if the antiphony is divided into layers. If well chosen, a relatively small portion built upon the Gregorian melodic “types” offers material for the entire liturgical year. Such a set of antiphons could also be translated into the vernacular using the same musical language.

Here, one thinks of the splendid examples presented by the late Theodore Marier in his Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Canticles.

More or less of this basic repertory could be replaced by more complicated or more individual melodies taken from a rich “additional” antiphony.

How large is the ‘minimum’ required for a basic repertory? We would need the antiphons taken from the psalms themselves (for the period per annum), 5-6 simple antiphons for each solemnity, for each season and also for the *commune sanctorum*. This amounts to no more than about 200 pieces, to be sung on 15 to 20 tunes (if they be well chosen), which is enough to sing through the

entire church year. About one thousand pieces suffice to enlarge this repertory with the proper antiphons of the whole *temporale*, meaning the individual clays of Advent, Lent etc. This number would be surpassed only in communities which learn and sing the Office intensively.

The Church does also need such communities, with regard to the past, present and future! In the case of the responsories, we might return to the basic set of psalmic responsories, adding a few for solemnities. This basic repertory should again be built on melodic “types”, since the recurrence of similar melodies makes learning much easier. Once these melodic types are known, the basic repertory could be enlarged, and communities well trained in reading music (which includes the schola) could take possession of the whole.

And so the entire Roman Antiphonary could survive in its original state, and the techniques for partial adaptation enable it to fit individual circumstances. In contrast, I regard as unrealistic the attempt to provide melodies for hundreds of new texts. *The Liturgia Horarum cannot be transformed into a new Antiphonary.*

The “concessions” concerning repertory and liturgical assignment are interrelated. If the repertory is reduced, precise assignment is called for. Fortunately, the history of liturgy presents good models for this task as well.

Earlier, attention was called to examples of performing the psalms *sub unica antiphona*. This custom can fairly be regarded as a concession for musically weak communities : one of the antiphons can be chosen and repeated after each psalm. A consuetudinary may define e.g. a medium-sized Advent set, adding the rules for adaptation. The learning process can be advanced by the observation that although there are some ancient sources which assign proper antiphons to each Hour, still, some antiphons return in different functions (for instance, in the Old Roman Office, the Vigil antiphons for Sunday are selected from the weekday canticle antiphons). Such selection, of course, makes the repertory of texts somewhat more meagre. Reviving and extending the mediaeval practise of versus ad repetendum might help: the psalms are accompanied by one single melodic antiphon, but the omitted antiphon is inserted before the return of the antiphona sola.

Moreover, we now have increasing historical evidence for the solo performance of antiphons in the past. A community made up of less-trained members, but with a good musician, could enrich its Office by the solo antiphon, whose emotional influence might equal that of the piece chanted in common.

My desire was to emphasise, with these examples, that what we need now is not a new antiphonary, but a re-discovery of the Roman Antiphonary. It can be adapted to contemporary conditions, too, without making arbitrary decisions. Vernacular translations are another story; at this point I remark only that the task is not basically different from what was discussed above.

A concluding reflection

To outsiders, all this seems unimportant, and the playful pastime of experts. But in this context, I regard as “outsiders” a majority of Christians and even of priests, too. For them, the structure and the very nature of the Office is a matter of complete indifference. “One has to pray what Rome has ordered.” “Only the spirit is essential.” “Christianity must not be ritualised.” A priest friend of mine, professor of theology, explained that the Office must be abolished, and in its place it would suffice to impose the obligation of half an hour’s prayer and spiritual reading upon each cleric. Well, Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony is of course also no more than a given number of notes, a,b,c-sharp and so on....

To my mind, the “insider” is not the scholar of liturgy, though when a decision is required, some knowledge of liturgical matters is undoubtedly called for. By “insider” I mean one who lived and lives in the liturgy, who is rooted and implanted into the permanency of the Church’s worship, who has learned in his own case how much the Office -- its shape, the conscious and unconscious experiences gathered from the Office -- can contribute to spirituality: how profoundly he was formed and educated day by day when taking part in the Office. Let us recall : **Chorus facit monachum** -- and not only monachum! The “insider” may experience how the words spoken in the Office convey the great tradition of the faith itself; he observes that the “how” of the Office, the radiation of its actual order, may influence our approach to faith and salvation. He feels the difference between the two: when we turn spontaneously to God, and when we join with the *ecclesia orans*, the praying Church. Such a Christian desires to know that he is not following the new ideas of some persons, solely by reason of obedience, but he desires assurance that the mature experience of the praying Church comes to him from the anonymity of the Great Times, in jib tempore, and that it is a great honour and privilege to follow this current of prayerful praise, to adapt his heart and mind to the words placed upon his lips, following St Benedict’s rule so frequently forgotten today: *ut mens concordet voci*, that the mind should follow what is expressed by the voice.