

A FEW THOUGHTS ON LITURGY

SINCE the Renaissance, the world has gained many sciences: but it has, in the process, lost not a few arts. All lost arts are to be regretted; but the loss of one of them should be a subject of special sorrow on the part of Catholics. It is the art of compiling Breviary Offices.

All flesh is not the same flesh: star differeth from star in glory. Each of our Breviaries—the Roman, the Monastic, the Dominican, the Ambrosian—contains offices of very varying degrees of beauty. Even the oldest offices, such as most of those in the *Proprium de Tempore* and the *Commune Sanctorum*, mark very different stages of the road to perfection; but speaking generally, it is in the Proper of Saints that the differences are most marked, and the modern offices which are the ugliest and least fitting.

The principal elements of the Breviary Office are five: antiphons, responsories, lessons, hymns and collects. The general custom of liturgists has always been to take the antiphons and responsories from Holy Scripture: although many locally-used offices exist in which these elements are rimed compositions of the form familiar to us from a number of the proper offices of saints in the Dominican use. The lessons, of course, are always taken from existing sources, the Bible or the writings of the Fathers. The compiler's opportunity for free composition, therefore, is normally restricted to the hymns and collects. Equally, bad hymns and collects frequently spoil an office.

Now, it is exactly here that the modern liturgist performs his task most badly. The collect in these

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days tends more and more to become an epitome of the history of the saint whom it celebrates. It is only necessary to compare the prayers which are appointed in the Roman Breviary for, *e.g.* St. Juliana, St. John Baptist de la Salle, St. Fidelis, St. Paul of the Cross, with those of St. Gregory, St. Callistus, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Laurence, in order to become convinced that the modern collect differs from the ancient in kind as well as in degree. The author's imagination seems to have run riot most in the case of St. Rose of Lima. Presumably the Saint's name was a temptation which he could not resist: but the result of his labours would not, we suspect, have been recognised as a collect by St. Gregory or St. Gelasius. In spite of its tendency to mixed metaphor, it is a beautiful prayer: but that of itself does not fit it for a place in the Breviary. A collect is meant to be constructed on very definite principles; in these days it is sometimes little more than a string of pretty phrases, sewn together with *ets*, which were not quite metrical enough to work into hymns.

And the hymns are in almost worse case. An example comes readily to hand. The Congregation of Rites has lately extended to the Universal Church the feasts of the Holy Family, of St. Gabriel, St. Raphael and St. Irenaeus. But the offices for these days, as just issued, provide some surprises. Each of the feasts in question has long had an office used widely in the Church, and to be found until lately in our Breviaries in the *Supplementum pro aliquibus locis*: and for the most part these offices have been kept unchanged. But a few changes there have been: and it is difficult to consider them otherwise than as changes for the worse.

We are all familiar with the results of Urban VIII's revision of the hymns of the Breviary. It is all but universally agreed that to tamper with the ancient text

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was, at the very least, an unhappy mistake. Yet in the newly-approved office of St. Raphael, the *Tibi Christe splendor Patris*, one of the few hymns which on this day at least had so far, with the substitution of a stanza relating to the Archangel of the office in place of the original stanza of St. Michael, been allowed to keep its original form unchanged, has disappeared in favour of a *cento* from *Placare Christe servulis*, the Urbanised version of the Vesper hymn for All Saints, adorned with a very bad new stanza and a new doxology. Presumably there is some good reason for the rejection of a very beautiful Carolingian hymn and the substitution of a mediocre twentieth-century patchwork of odd stanzas: but it is hard to discover.

St. Gabriel has been presented with the same hymn, the special stanza relating to St. Raphael being imitated for 'God's confidential clerk,' as the Dominican Breviary calls him. Here the strangeness is even more pronounced. In the case of St. Raphael there were not many existing hymns from which to choose; but St. Gabriel has several, all quite beautiful. The Carmelite Breviary gives him a special version of *Tibi Christe*; the Dominican and Franciscan Breviaries each contain (or rather *contained*, for in the case of the latter they have just been revised out of existence) two very excellent proper hymns, any of which would have adorned the Roman office-books. It is not easy to appreciate the necessity of inventing new hymns for saints who have long enjoyed a widespread cultus when there is the wealth of Dreves and Blume to draw upon.

Another instance of seemingly unnecessary change, though in another part of the office, appears in the case of St. Irenaeus. From time immemorable the Gospel assigned to this saint has been that which our Missals give for St. Thomas of Canterbury: *Ego sum*

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Pastor bonus. The peculiar appropriateness of this Gospel to the feast needs no emphasis. But the revisers have substituted for it the passage from St. Matt. x, 28—33, beginning *Nolite timere eos qui occidunt corpus.* This seems to have been done in order that a passage of the Saint's *Adversus Haereses* might be used for the lessons of the Third Nocturn. This is very well; but to make the Gospel fit the lessons, rather than the lessons the Gospel, is a proceeding which would hardly have appealed to earlier liturgists! Admittedly the new Gospel suits St. Irenaeus quite well; so does any one of the Gospels which the Church has set apart for feasts of martyrs. The whole point of the *Ego sum Pastor bonus* is that out of the dozen which might have been chosen, it is the one which occurs immediately to us as summing up our Saint in the words of the Evangelist.

But our loss is seen most clearly when we look at the Proper supplement for any English diocese. For we in England have lost the liturgical sense more completely perhaps than any other people. Our country has not been lacking in Saints: the Westminster Diocesan Proper contains thirty-six offices of Saints either proper to the diocese, or given higher rank therein than they have in the Universal Kalendar. Apart from collects and lessons for the Second or Third Nocturn, these have among them as proper parts of the office not a single hymn, two antiphons and versicles (St. George and St. Edmund Rich) and one set of lessons for the First Nocturn (Blessed Thomas More). Apart from one or two feasts which have offices common to a great part of the Church, such as Our Lady Help of Christians and Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, there are in all the rest of England and Wales only two other feasts which have even a proper antiphon to the Gospel Canticles: St. Boniface in Plymouth and St. Cuthbert in Hexham. The

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Common of Saints is meant to be used, of course : but is it meant to be used quite as freely as this? In France they do not think so. The diocese of Nancy and Toul keeps eighty-one feasts not in the Universal Kalendar. Of these seventy-five have some part of the office proper other than lessons or collects. And in reply to the objection which will certainly be forthcoming here, it may be said at once that a very small proportion of these are inherited from Jansenist and de Vintimille Breviaries. This may be carrying the principle of proper offices too far : but at least it shows a keen desire to keep green the memory of local saints and to render them special homage. If there are no office-compilers in London, Middlesex or Hertford at the present day, might not approval be sought for the use in the diocese of some of the offices already existing which are used for the saints of the diocese in other places? St. Gregory the Great and St. Austin of Canterbury have offices of their own among several Benedictine Congregations, which could easily be adapted to the Roman form; St. George has an office which is found here and there in Spain, Brazil, Holland, and elsewhere; St. Germanus appears in more than one French Diocesan Proper; St. Hugh of Lincoln may be found in the supplement for Grenoble, his office adorned with proper antiphons. And again, the construction of a worthy proper office for May 4th ought not to baffle our liturgists. They have done very well with the Mass.

And while speaking of our English dioceses, why should there not be a feast of All Saints of England? The recent introduction of a special Kalendar for each diocese has resulted in many of our great English saints having no liturgical commemoration in some places; thus neither St. Aidan, beloved of 'Anglo-Catholics,' nor St. Wilfred, less so, nor even St. Cuthbert, appears any longer in the Westminster Kalendar.

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It may be well that their individual feasts have been abolished; but might they not have at least a common commemoration? In Ireland, where the separate feasts of all the outstanding national saints are kept in every diocese, there is in addition a feast of All Saints of the Island; surely England should have one much more, since in many cases their names have disappeared from the liturgy altogether. (Who of us has heard of St. Serapion?) But who would write the office?

It is not only in England that the Church suffers from lack of proportion between proper and common in the Breviary. The Roman Breviary itself is not free from it. We could very well spare the hymns of St. Hermenegild, St. Venantius, St. John Cantius, to mention three cases only, in return for proper offices for one or two other saints, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Benedict. Indeed, sometimes one wonders as much at the things which are not in the Roman Breviary as at those which are. To get back to hymns, for example. Where is *Deus Creator omnium*, the magnificent evening hymn of St. Ambrose? Where is *Beate martyr, prospera*? Where *O quam glorifica*? Happily not altogether dead—each of these, and many others lost from our books, are still to be found in some local use or other—but dead to the Church in general.

France, perhaps, appreciates her saints best. She has found a way of paying two of them a very graceful compliment. Chartres has not forgotten its bishop, St. Fulbert, and when his feast-day, April 10th, falls in Eastertide, at Vespers is sung his own magnificent hymn, familiar to those of us who remember the Sarum use, a hymn whose majestic jubilation has never been excelled, if indeed it has been even equalled—*Chorus novae Jerusalem*. Poitiers, too, on St. Hilary's day, uses a hymn written by the saint himself—*Lucis lar-*

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gitor splendide—quaintly introduced by the stanza :

*Exsul ad oras Phrygiae,
Dulcisque memor filiae,
Laudes matutinas Deo
Sic canebat Hilarius.*

One wonders, again, now that the Congregation of Rites has approved offices for the Common of Many Confessors and of Many Holy Women, why it refrains from allowing them to the universal Church and inserting them in their place in the Breviary. We are still compelled, when keeping the feast of the Seven Founders or that of SS. Cyril and Methodius, to salute these unfortunate saints as *Iste homo*. This can hardly be from respect to the prescriptive rights of the Common of Saints; for after all, over-worked printers have been allowed to invent a Common of Our Lady, and in the latest Franciscan Breviary a *Commune Angelorum* has been manufactured in the same way. But perhaps we may hope that this anomaly will be removed when the present labours of the revisers of Breviaries are ended.

A last word. Kalendars, perhaps, are hardly our business; but may we plead for a strangely neglected saint—St. Mary Magdalene? In these days every arrival in heaven becomes almost automatically a double; might not the *Apostolorum Apostola* at last become a *duplex majus* at least, even if she cannot have in the Roman rite her beautiful antiphon, *O mundi lampas*? One feels, too, that St. Ignatius and St. Augustine, as founders of great religious orders, might be raised to the same rank as their brethren, St. Dominic and St. Benedict, even though that rank is under the new rubrics little more than an honorary distinction. But perhaps the authorities remember the days when at Quimper every priest, on the anniversary of his ordination, became, for one glorious day *per annum*, a semi-double all to himself!