

The Rolling Revolution

By Gordon E. Truitt

If one considers a “revolution” to be “a complete or marked change in something,” then the introduction of the *Missale Romanum* of Pope Paul VI in 1970¹ marked the culmination of a huge and quite successful rolling liturgical revolution that spanned the twentieth century.

That revolution changed the way lay people saw themselves and their role in liturgical assemblies and the way clergy saw their role in relation to the rest of the church. Before the dawn of this revolution, the vast majority of Catholics understood the liturgy to be something that the priest enacted *in persona Christi* on their behalf and for the world’s salvation. By the end of the twentieth century, a large majority of Catholics would find themselves agreeing with these statements from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “It is the whole *community*, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates. . . . The celebrating assembly is the community of the baptized in which ‘the members do not all have the same function.’”²

The first two volleys in this revolution were sounded by Pope St. Pius X. In 1903 he issued *motu proprio* (“under his own authority”) the statement *Tra le sollecitudini*, which gave papal encouragement to finding ways to involve lay people in the liturgy. Specifically, he encouraged the use of chant by choirs and even by the congregation, which would lead to an enriching of the Christian spirit “from its foremost and indispensable font, which is the *active participation* in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church” (*Tra*, introduction, emphasis added). One year later, Pius entrusted the development of a Vatican edition of chant books to the monks of Solesmes.

Then, in 1905, Pope Pius began his campaign to encourage frequent lay reception of sacramental communion—overthrowing nearly a thousand years of nonreception by the great majority of lay people. At his urging, Vatican congregations encouraged even daily communion; in 1906 Pius offered a special indulgence to those who received sacramental communion five times a week or who promoted frequent reception; in 1907, in the decree *Quam singulari*, he set the age for first reception of communion at about seven rather than twelve, which had been the prevailing norm.³

The third major development introduced vernacular hand missals for lay people, accompanied by the “dialogue Mass.” Both of these came into occasional use early in the twentieth century, and both received official Vatican approbation. By 1935, the Sacred Congregation of Rites had approved several versions of the dialogue Mass. By 1960, many people were familiar with the texts of the Mass in translation, and many also participated out loud in the dialogues, even, in some places, reciting at low Mass some texts that would be sung at high Mass.

The fourth step came again at the instigation of the papacy: a reform of the very rites of the liturgy that reached its high point in the revision of the Holy Week rites in 1955. In 1948, Pope Pius XII established a Pontifical Commission for the Reform of the Liturgy (its secretary was Monsignor Annibale Bugnini). This commission introduced a revised ritual for the Easter Vigil *ad experimentum* in 1951. It was well received, so it was incorporated in 1955 into a set of reformed liturgies for all of Holy Week. This change in the very heart of the liturgical year was accepted with spectacular affirmation,

and its wide acceptance fueled the very positive way that the postconciliar commissions approached their task of liturgical revision.

For those people—like my mother—who had grown up with these changes, the full participation of lay people in a vernacularized liturgy following the Second Vatican Council and enshrined in the *Missale* of Paul VI was just another step in a rolling reform that had been approved and instigated by the papacy. It was, for people like her, a logical progression, and it carried the authority of the pope, after all. For others, who were unaware that the twentieth century had already changed many aspects of Roman Catholic liturgy, either because their parish had been unaffected by some of them, or because they didn't go to any services during Holy Week except Palm Sunday (and maybe *Tenebrae*) and Easter Sunday Mass, or because it was all in Latin anyway, the liturgical reform following the Second Vatican Council came as a total shock. But for everyone, whether prepared for it or not, the postconciliar reform—especially the eventual full vernacularization of the liturgy—was the one phase of the twentieth century liturgical revolution that affected all Catholics, unavoidable except for those few Masses offered in Latin (but now, for the most part, using the Order of Mass of Paul VI and therefore requiring lay participation).

Even at that, lay involvement and the introduction of the vernacular might have gone fairly smoothly, if it were not for several developments—changes in attitude, cultural events, political upheavals—that seemed to accompany the introduction of vernacular liturgy and, indeed, to use the liturgy as a vehicle for the dissemination of clashing ecclesiologies, cultures, and politics.

The Growing Tide

Liturgical changes began even as Vatican II was continuing. The intent was to introduce the changes carefully, step-by-step, with frequent and substantial feedback from the world's bishops. The problem was that this careful plan was overwhelmed by events within the Church and in the wider culture. Still, the plan proceeded, with strong support from Pope Paul VI. Paul kept close watch on the progress of reform and regularly criticized those who would bar any change as well as those who would leap ahead of the reform and promote their own agendas instead of the careful plan of change. Education, the formation of appropriate leadership, and improved preaching were early priorities, always guided by “the conciliar intent on promoting active participation of the faithful.”⁴ The problem was, as the Vatican quickly observed, the phrase “active participation” meant many things to many people. To some, it meant what the Vatican seemed to mean by the phrase—a fuller involvement of each person in the self-offering with Christ at the heart of the Eucharist, expressed in song, silence, speech, and posture, leading to a life centered on the Eucharist and expressive of a eucharistic theology. To others, it meant a democratization of the liturgy: Everybody does everything. To still others, it meant a more fervent internal participation that might be expressed minimally in speech or action or even in listening and observation. For too many priests, who felt that they understood just what the council intended (from a conservative or a liberal perspective), “active participation” meant what *I* determine it means, no matter what the documents say or the current needs of the parish seem to require.

The reform of the liturgical books proceeded quite deliberately, following a pattern in which scholars worked to develop a draft text that was, in many cases and despite appearance sometimes, not too far removed either from current practice or from liturgical history, which text was then reviewed and, possibly, altered several times before receiving papal approval for *ad experimentum* use. Feedback from the bishops led to additional revisions (or even whole rewrites) before an official text was distributed for translation into the various vernacular languages. Here was the problem: Many priests didn't wait for the new books but began to make up their own rites, prayers, and actions. Collections of unapproved eucharistic prayers began to circulate; changes were made in ritual structure on the basis of shock value, coolness, or preservation of older rites. And all of this was done with no sense of responsibility to the wider community or to the tradition of Catholic praying. Those who tried to follow the slowly developing reform by adhering to the books were considered reactionaries and were branded with the worst stigma of the time: They were just not with it.

And similar unexpected turns marked the development of music for worship: Toward the end of the council and in its immediate aftermath, major Catholic publishers provided hymnal resources that matched and expressed the developing reform of the rites. The first edition of the *Peoples Mass Book* (the white-covered successor to the 1962 *Peoples Hymnal* from the World Library of Sacred Music) appeared in 1964; its major competitor for space in the pews—a new edition of *Our Parish Prays and Sings* (from The Liturgical Press)—appeared two years later.⁵ Both of these resources drew on the best of the Catholic hymn tradition while borrowing liberally from Protestant sources and introducing Catholic congregations to the “hymn revival” of the twentieth century. At the same time, as a self-described “supplement to adult hymnals,” the first edition of the *Hymnal for Young Christians* was published by F.E.L. Publications in Chicago. The wave of “folk music” by writers such as those found in this collection would soon threaten to overwhelm the careful work undertaken by the major publishers to provide congregational, choral, and instrumental music with “the qualities proper to genuine sacred music [that] can be sung . . . by large choirs [and] . . . small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 121). In fact, this new music would soon drive the work of many liturgical composers in the United States.

In the year that the Second Vatican Council ended (1965), the war in Vietnam heated up with the involvement of US ground forces following a military coup in South Vietnam; the first antiwar protests reached the District of Columbia; thousands of people flocked to Selma, Alabama, to join Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a civil rights march to Montgomery; El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X) was assassinated in Harlem; the Big Bang theory of the beginning of the universe received substantial confirmation; the Beatles, the Byrds, and the Rolling Stones were musical leaders of what was called a “youth revolution”; riots erupted in Watts, in south central Los Angeles; India and Pakistan fought two wars; Pope Paul VI became the first reigning pope to visit the United States when he came to New York to address the United Nations on issues of war and peace; and *A Charlie Brown Christmas* received its television premiere. People began talking about the “spirit of Vatican II” and contrasting that attitude of openness with some of the more careful and deliberate statements in the conciliar documents. Catholic priests and nuns—identifiable by their Roman collars and religious habits—became involved in dramatic demonstrations for social change.

The following two years included more of the same, though at higher pitch and louder volume. The whole culture of the West seemed to be re-forming (or coming apart), and it was taking the church with it. Heady with the results of the Second Vatican Council, at a time when seminaries, convents, and religious houses were full—and dioceses and religious orders were rapidly building new schools, seminaries, and convents—and when youth and change seemed to dominate the news, many former leaders (bishops, seminary rectors, theologians, mother superiors) gave up trying to control or direct the flow of change.

Consider three examples (among many that could be chosen) of what was happening. The first tells of people involved in a careful process of implementation of liturgical change. The second suggests some of the divisions that were developing in the church. And the third shows a situation spinning out of control.

As the spate of liturgical change moved into floodtide in the mid-1960s, dioceses and various institutions struggled to find ways to receive, organize, and implement the changes—especially to find ways to provide appropriate catechesis and formation for clergy and lay people alike. What was then the Bishops' Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate (BCLA) began a newsletter for the bishops and their liturgical commissions; seminaries and universities offered courses and training programs; publishers offered official texts and other resources; and associations like the Liturgical Conference and the Southwest Liturgical Conference continued their annual meetings—now more heavily attended than before the council. The journal *Worship*, no longer disguised in a plain brown wrapper, was now sold above the counter in seminary bookstores.

One of the more successful diocesan programs took shape in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Beginning in 1965, with its *Pastoral Directory*, the archdiocese began what came to be known as the Chicago Liturgy Training Program (later known as Liturgy Training Publications or LTP). A survey by the BCLA in 1966 showed that twenty-six dioceses in the United States had adopted or recommended Chicago's *Pastoral Directory*. One year later, the renamed Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy recommended the publications in the Chicago Liturgy Training Program to all diocesan liturgical commissions. The curious thing about this highly successful program and its widely used publications is that most of its operations were housed in the basement of Tom and Mae Dore, who oversaw what became a worldwide distribution of materials prepared under the early guidance of Chicago priest Ted Stone and later in cooperation with Father Dan Coughlin. Thomas Vincent Dore and his wife, Irma Mae McCahill Dore, ran the distribution program after Tom had retired from Sears: They were simply interested lay people who had enthusiastically embraced the liturgical renewal and its catechetical component. The guestbook that Mae kept suggested that their home was a hub of liturgical activity: Every major liturgical figure who passed through Chicago came to the Dore home, either for planned meetings or just to meet the couple at the heart of this excellent renewal program.

The second example, revealing some of the tensions in the reform, is a meeting of church musicians and liturgists that took place in Kansas City, Missouri, at the end of 1966, in the wake of a confrontational meeting among musicians earlier that year at the Fifth International Church Music Congress (the first meeting of this congress in the United States) in Chicago and Milwaukee. Cosponsored by the Liturgical Conference and the Church Music Association of America, the Kansas City gathering was an attempt to bring together “progressives” and “conservatives” for dialogue. Instead, it solidified

the two camps and created what seemed to be an unbridgeable divide; the dividing line was the weight assigned to “active participation” in music as in other aspects of worship and what would be required to move people to such participation.⁶ Robert Blanchard laid out the extremes to which people were tending. On the one hand were those who pushed for participation by the people “at any cost. . . . As long as the people are singing, it matters not *what* they are singing. . . . This position . . . simply negates, not only the importance of music, but music—the art and science—itself.”⁷ At the other extreme he found those who would emphasize the importance of sacred music as an art. Generally, the thinking is that present attempts at sacred music, and in particular new musical settings of the vernacular texts, fall far short of the height of perfection Latin sacred music had reached. Therefore, rather than use music that is less than great, we should continue to use the Latin chants and other Latin musical settings until the English settings reach a similar perfection.⁸

Abbot Rembert Weakland, OSB, presented the case for the moderate progressives. He admitted that liturgists had to help “serious” composers understand what the liturgy is supposed to be, if the musicians are to choose or compose music for the reformed liturgy, but he maintained that such music was not to be found by going “backwards in time to find an art-music that will satisfy the liturgical demands of today. Those who seek to solve the problem of participation in this way, by listening or by singing, will fail. . . .”⁹ Instead, he maintained, “we will not expect to find the holy in music by archaism, but in our own twentieth-century idiom.”¹⁰

On the other hand, speaking for the moderate conservatives, was Father Francis P. Schmitt, the much-honored director of music at Boys Town, Nebraska. He described his thesis this way: “I think that music for worship should be the best that is possible in any given milieu. Not the most difficult, not the easiest, not even the most pleasing, but the best. . . . It is not simply a case of participating in something. . . . There is hardly any spiritual advantage in foisting bad music on either God or neighbor.”¹¹ Catholic congregations would not sing—and certainly would not know how to sing fine music—he explained, “if we are not seriously determined to make music a technical part of our children’s education” and “unless we have trained, and are willing to pay, competent organists; and unless we are willing to install organs capable of supporting congregational singing . . . I am not ruling out the guitar’s taking over.”¹² Speaking to the issue of preserving the treasures of the past, he asked: “Why should we not allow that there are not only people for whom it is meaningful to sing these things, but people for whom it is meaningful to listen to them, both the singing and the listening comprising an act of worship?”¹³

The third example—of things falling apart—is set at Theological College at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, the national seminary. Under the direction of the priests of the Society of St. Sulpice, it is a place to which any US bishop may send seminarians. In 1966, the seminary was bursting at the seams, and some rooms that had been doubles had to house three seminarians. The rector was Very Rev. John McCormick, SS, a much-beloved and progressive rector. But in the years following the Council, as seminarians began skipping out on morning and evening prayer and even daily Mass; as they changed their classroom attire from cassock or black suit, white shirt, and tie to slacks and colored shirts (but still, usually, a tie); as they demanded a curfew to replace the traditional “grand silence” and then began slipping back into the building long after curfew; as they began to take classes in subjects other than

philosophy, theology, or religious education (often with their bishops' blessings), Father McCormick was reduced from an admired leader to a sputtering comic figurehead, able only to criticize deacons for not genuflecting as they entered or left the seminary chapel.¹⁴ One of the seminary faculty even admitted to an alumnus that they no longer knew what criteria to use to decide whether or not a candidate was fit for ordination.

Everything, it seems, came to a head in 1968. This was the year that split the church—or revealed divisions that had been building for close to a decade. Everything that was going on divided people between left and right, progressive and conservative, even, on the left, radical and liberal. It was the year of the Tet Offensive and the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam; the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., which led to riots and the declaration of martial law in several US cities, and of Robert Kennedy, which led many young people to become disillusioned with the political process—though many of them showed up for the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that was marked by a “police riot”; and it was the year that saw the election of Richard Nixon to succeed Lyndon Johnson as president. It was the year of *Humanae Vitae* and of unprecedented protests by Catholic theologians, clergy, and lay people against this papal teaching on birth control. It was the year in which the North American Liturgical Week, gathered in Washington, DC, meeting without (for the first time in its history) the approval of the local archbishop, adopted a theme borrowed from E. E. Cummings: “damn everything but the circus.” It was a time when liberal-leaning Catholics regularly evoked the “spirit of Vatican II,” which, at its extreme, was described by Michael Novak as an attitude that sometimes soared far beyond the actual, hard-won documents and decisions of Vatican II. . . . It was as though the world (or at least the history of the Church) were now to be divided into only two periods, pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II. Everything “pre” was then pretty much dismissed, so far as its *authority* mattered. For the most extreme, to be a Catholic now meant to believe more or less anything one wished to believe, or at least in the sense in which one personally interpreted it. One could be a Catholic “in spirit.” One could take *Catholic* to mean the “culture” in which one was born, rather than to mean a creed making objective and rigorous demands. One could imagine Rome as a distant and irrelevant anachronism, embarrassment, even adversary. Rome as “them.”¹⁵

Fully Participatory, Fully Vernacular

It was in this atmosphere that the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* was introduced in 1969, heralding the new missal that would appear a year later. The practice of congregational participation both as the worshiping assembly and as ministers of the rite, of course, had been introduced shortly after the Council. Lay people were proclaiming the reading (there was only one before the gospel until the revised *Lectionary for Mass*), providing commentary on the rites, and leading singing—the role of “cantor” had been introduced as part of the commentator’s role. By 1966, at least ninety dioceses used the prayer of the faithful at Sunday Mass; fifty-eight of those required its use on Sundays, and many encouraged it as part of weekday Mass as well.¹⁶

As early as 1964, many countries were introducing vernacular languages for readings at Mass. For those scriptural texts, English-speaking countries adopted existing translations—five translations were approved for use in the United States. Other parts of the Mass were permitted in the vernacular in 1965—prayers at the foot of the altar, the

collects, prefaces (but, until 1967, not the Roman Canon), and some other texts—and many of the first translations that the International Committee on English in the Liturgy provided for a “missal supplement” called the *Sacramentary* actually came from existing sources like the *Daily Missal of the Mystical Body (Maryknoll Missal)* and, for the translated hymns for the Divine Office and sequences, Joseph Connelly’s *Hymns of the Roman Liturgy* (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957).

In the fall of 1966, Pope Paul VI announced his intention to submit a draft version of a revised *Ordo Missae* to the world’s bishops for their evaluation and judgment. In the United States, believing that such a revised Order of Mass could only be evaluated in use, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB, later the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) announced its intent to ask for *ad experimentum* use of that draft “in specific and controlled communities, and always with the consent of the local bishop.” The US bishops established a Study Committee (later a Subcommittee) on Liturgical Adaptation to review proposals for experimentation in accord with the bishops’ program and to make preliminary plans to “accommodate” the Roman liturgy to US cultural needs and mentality. Members of the committee included three bishops, four lay people, one religious sister, nine priests, and one Benedictine archabbot. Many of these people had been at the forefront of the liturgical movement before and during the Council, and many of them shaped the US response to liturgical reform.

In 1968, the Consilium (the Vatican body overseeing liturgical reform) turned down the US bishops’ proposals for experimentation. The Vatican did provide for experimentation in very narrow circumstances, but that was no longer enough for the progressives who wanted to keep moving forward in what, they were convinced, was the direction that liturgical reform ought to go. So despite regular declarations against it and warnings from the Consilium, Pope Paul VI, and the NCCB, “experimental use” became “experimentation” without any controls or oversight. One earlier document from Rome noted what came to be repeated in subsequent statements: the lack of a valid ecclesiology in some experimental liturgies. Such experiments, the document said, are “not in conformity with the letter and spirit of the liturgical constitution of the Second Vatican Council, . . . are contrary to the ecclesial meaning of the liturgy, and . . . damage the unity of the Church and the dignity of the people of God.”¹⁷

Again and again, in documents and comments from Rome, the US bishops, and dioceses in the years between 1965 and 1970, three things stood out that defined the liturgical developments of these years: The overall liturgical renewal was important, was proceeding as planned (despite opposition from both left and right), and was being successfully received in communities around the world; both obstructionist rejection of the reform and illicit experimentation were to be rejected as false to the intent of the Council and as anti-ecclesial; and there was a continuing need among clergy, vowed religious, and lay people for solid catechesis, education, and liturgical formation. Indeed, it was this need for catechesis and formation that appeared to be the great challenge of these years. Despite strong and continuing efforts, the kind of formation that the liturgical reform required seemed to be lacking. So in 1969, the fall meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops affirmed that the major question facing the bishops and the local churches “was the need for extensive education and preparation of all the Catholic people for the changes in worship. There was complete agreement on this point, and it did not have to be submitted to vote.”¹⁸

The Order of Mass, the *Lectionary for Mass*, and two other sacramental rites were introduced to the church in the United States for optional use in March 1970 (their use was required by November of that year). In places where appropriate formation had taken place, these new books and the orders for worship that they contained were received with great joy. In other places, they were tolerated because they were required by ecclesiastical law. (Some few priests even expressed a conviction that the vernacular liturgy was invalid, but they still celebrated Mass using the *Missale* of Paul VI, refusing to leave the Roman communion to follow Archbishop Marcel-François Lefebvre into his newly founded Society of St. Pius X.) In yet other places, where “experimentation,” “pastoral adaptation,” and “full participation” were the watchwords, the books were dead on arrival. Fortunately, the two extremes were in the minority, and the introduction of the Order of Mass in 1970 capped the twentieth century’s remarkably successful rolling liturgical revolution.

Notes

1. An English-Latin version of the *Missale Romanum* with some postconciliar changes was introduced in 1966. With the apostolic constitution *Missale Romanum* (April 3, 1969), Pope Paul VI introduced the first complete postconciliar *Missale Romanum*, calling for its use on the following First Sunday of Advent, 1969. The Latin text of the book itself, however, was not available until 1970. The first full English translation of the Sunday texts from the 1970 *Missale* of Pope Paul VI was approved for provisional use in 1972, but the full English version—called the *Sacramentary*—was not introduced until 1974.

2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1140–1142; online at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

3. At the end of the nineteenth century, lay participation in Mass through reception of communion had been a rare thing, but by 1970 it was all but assumed that nearly everyone at Mass would receive communion.

4. Sacred Congregation of Rites (Consilium), instruction *Inter Oecumenici* (September 26, 1964), 4.

5. The entry from the Gregorian Institute of America—*Hymnal of Christian Unity* (1964) ran third against these more popular congregational hymnals.

6. The papers from this meeting were published as *Crisis in Church Music?*, hereafter *Crisis* (Washington, DC: The Liturgical Conference, 1967).

7. Robert I. Blanchard, “Church Music Today—The Center Position,” *Crisis*, 67.

8. *Ibid.*, 68.

9. Rembert Weakland, OSB, “Music and Liturgy in Evolution,” *Crisis*, 4.

10. *Ibid.*, 12.

11. Francis P. Schmitt, “Leaning Right?” in *Crisis*, 53.

12. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

13. *Ibid.*, 57.

14. Father McCormick was replaced as rector in 1968 by a darling of the “progressive” Catholics, Rev. Eugene Walsh, SS. Father Walsh resigned as rector two years later.

15. Michael Novak, introduction to the Transaction Edition of *The Open Church* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2001), online at <http://www.aei.org/basicPages/20031124161414312>.

16. Report of a survey of diocesan liturgical practice taken during the spring of 1966, Bishops’ Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate *Newsletter* 2:10 (October 1966) in Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Thirty-five Years of the BCL Newsletter* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), 55.

17. Joint declaration of the Congregation of Rites and the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, English translation in *Newsletter of the Bishops’ Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate* 3:1 (January 1967).

18. *Newsletter of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy* 5:10–11 (October–November 1969).

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