

THE TRADITIONAL AND NOVEL RITES OF PENANCE

A COMPARISON

Penance was a difficult sacrament to compare, as so much of it, in both rites, is extensively individualized. The Church has never required that, for example, the act of contrition be expressed in any particular words, provided that the necessary ideas are present, and obviously the sins themselves will be different each time. Furthermore, the Novel Rite has a relatively involved introductory ceremony which is wholly absent in the Traditional Rite, and which, moreover, this author has never seen actually used. Lastly, the Novel Rite has a number of different services in which this sacrament is administered, some of which are communal and quite involved. Therefore, this comparison involves only those parts of the respective rites which occurs after the sins have been confessed and the act of contrition made.

THE NOVEL RITE

While the Traditional Rite requires that the priest extend his right hand toward the penitent, the Novel rite requires that the priest extend both hands. While this is somewhat similar to what is done in many Eastern rites, those rites also require that the priest put his stole over the penitent, while the Novel Rite here has no corresponding ritual, nor is there any reason why the Eastern practice is superior to

Tunc sacerdos, manibus super caput penitentis extensis (vel saltem manu dextera extensa), dicit:

Then the priest, with hands extended over the head of the penitent (or at least with right hand extended), says:

The Traditional Catholic will easily recognize these two prayers as being those following the Confiteor at Mass, providing a clear connection between the absolution at Mass and the absolution here, while still clearly delineating the difference.

The Novel Rite eliminates the second of these prayers in Mass, and both in confession. Thus there is no clear link to the absolution

The Traditional Rite is more precise here; it specifically requires that the priest name not only sins, but also ecclesiastical censures. It further explicitly names the one who forgives: the priest, "by [God's] authority". The priest speaks with God's authority, and expresses that

Deus, Pater misericordiarum, qui per mortem et resurrectionem Filii sui mundum sibi reconciliavit et Spiritum Sanctum effudit in remissionem peccatorum, per

May God, the Father of mercies, Who by the death and resurrection of His Son reconciled the world to Himself and poured out the Holy Spirit for the remission of sins, through the ministry of

THE TRADITIONAL RITE

the Traditional Western. The Novel Rite does permit that the right hand method be used "at least", as though the centuries-old Traditional practice were a grudging concession.

In the Traditional Rite, the hand is raised slightly later, but remains up for longer, and is used for the sign of the Cross at the words of absolution.

When the priest wishes to absolve the penitent, first joined to him, and some salutary penance having been received by him, he first says:

Cum Sacerdos penitentem absolvere velit, injuncta ei prius, et ab eo acceptata salutari penitentia, primo dicit:

at Mass, which very importantly cleanses the devout faithful from venial sins, and that in confession, which (with the words of absolution) cleanses the faithful from all sins.

As confession and Mass are the ceremonies with which the Catholic will be most intimately familiar, this connection is very profitable, and its excision a loss.

May the Almighty God have mercy on thee, and thy sins having been forgiven, may He lead thee unto eternal life. Amen.

Then, right hand held up toward the penitent, he says:

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant thee indulgence, absolution, and remission of thy sins. Amen.

Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, et dimissis peccatis tuis, perducatur te ad vitam aeternam. Amen.

Deinde dextera versus penitentem elevata, dicit:

Indulgentiam, absolutionem, et remissionem peccatorum tuorum tribuat tibi omnipotens, et misericors Dominus. Amen.

clearly here. In the Novel Rite, this entire prayer has been excised, mentioning only a general "ministry of the Church", and not mentioning ecclesiastical punishments at all, in replacement.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ absolve thee: and I, by His authority, absolve thee from all bond of excommunication, suspension, and interdict, of whatever kind I am able and thou de-

Dominus noster Jesus Christus te absolvat: et ego auctoritate ipsius te absolvo ab omni vinculo excommunicationis, suspensionis, et interdicti, in quantum possum, et

ministerium Ecclesiae indulgentiam tibi tribuat et pacem.

the Church grant thee pardon and peace.

servest. Then

tu indiges. Deinde

The actual words of absolution are, mercifully, unchanged in the Novel Rite. Indeed, even the sign of the Cross is retained. Would that

the rest of the rite had treated the form of the sacraments, and the tradition on which they all rest, so respectfully.

Et ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.

And I absolve thee from thy sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I absolve thee from thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

Pœnitens respondet:
Amen.

The penitent responds:
Amen.

If the penitent is a layman, the word suspension is omitted. A bishop, in absolving the faithful, makes the sign of the Cross three times.

Si pœnitens sit laicus, omititur verbum suspensionis. Episcopus autem in absolvendis fidelibus ter signum crucis facit.

This beautiful prayer, like so many others, has been completely removed in the Novel Rite. In the Traditional Rite, however, the priest begs that Our Lord, His Mother, and His saints apply their merits to

the penitent, and grant him not only the forgiveness of his sins, but also grace and life everlasting.

May the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints, anything of good thou mightst do and anything of evil thou mightst suffer, be for thee the remission of sins, the increase of grace, and the gift of eternal life. Amen.

Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi, merita beatæ Mariæ Virginis, et omnium Sanctorum, quidquid boni feceris, et mali sustinueris, sint tibi in remissionem peccatorum, augmentum gratiæ, et præmium vitæ æternæ. Amen.

For a just cause, May the Almighty God, etc. may be omitted; it is enough to say May Our Lord Jesus Christ, etc., as above, all the way to May the Passion of Our Lord, etc.

Justa de causa omitti potest Misereatur, etc., et satis est dicere: Dominus noster Jesus Christus, etc., ut supra, usque ad illud: Passio Domini nostri, etc.

In the the case of some truly urgent grave necessity in danger of death, the priest may say only:

Urgente vero aliqua gravi necessitate in periculo mortis, Sacerdos breviter dicere poterit:

I absolve thee from all censures and sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ego te absolvo ab omnibus censuris, et peccatis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

The Novel Rite has created from nothing this brief concluding rite. It's worth noting that it adds little or nothing to the notions of contrition, penance, and forgiveness central to the sacrament. It's also worth no-

ting that it, like so much else in the Novel Rite, need not even look anything like this; "[o]ther texts" are permitted, depriving the faithful even of this brief moment of reliable consistency.

Post absolutionem, sacerdos prosequitur:

After absolution, the priest continues:

Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus.

Praise the Lord, for He is good.

Pœnitens concludit:

The penitent concludes:

Quoniam in sæculum misericordia eius.

For His mercy is forever.

Deinde sacerdos pœnitentem

Then the priest dismisses the reconciled peni-

reconciliatum dimittit, di- tent, saying:
cens:

Dominus dimisit peccata The Lord has forgiven thy sins.
tua. Vade in pace. Go in peace.

Alii textus ad libitum, n. 93. Other texts are permitted in n. 93.

All in all, the changes made to the rite of penance are the least unhinged of all the changes in the Novel Rite. The very critical words, the words of absolution, are unchanged; and, to be fair, there was much less formal rite to be changed. Still, the Novel Rite does manage to lose much that is good in the Traditional Rite, further cementing its status as a truly different rite, rather than another form of the same rite.