Introduction

In an age of ever-greater academic specialisation, it may appear outdated for a single author to offer a history of the basic structure and ritual shape of the Roman Mass, which aspires to begin with the Last Supper and the origins of the Eucharist and constructs a narrative through centuries of intense religious, social and cultural transformations to conclude with the aftermath of the Council of Trent. My chosen topic is vast and intricate, and its manifold aspects have been treated in depth by a plethora of scholars in the last few decades. Such a broad subject may, it might be argued, be better considered in a companion or handbook, which would incorporate chapters from a range of contributors with well-defined expertise.

In view of such legitimate questions a reader may raise, it will be important to acknowledge the legacies of earlier scholarship and to state what this book is not. It is not meant to compete with the classical work of Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, which is still indispensable for its command of primary sources. Nevertheless, Jungmann’s narrative of decline from the original and pure idea of *eucharistia*, which is a key assumption in his work, has rightly been criticised.¹

While I cannot match the detail of Jungmann’s scholarship, I propose to offer a new overview of key developments in the Roman Mass from its formative period in late antiquity to its post-Tridentine standardisation, based on a wide range of specialist contributions. This broader perspective will open up insights that can advance scholarly research and debate.

The topic and character of this work will make it of immediate interest to students of liturgy and theology, both in an academic and in a pastoral setting. When I first conceived the idea for this book, I also had in mind students of history in general and, in particular, students of the history of architecture, art, music and literature, who are in need of a compact guide to the Roman Mass, since it has been such a powerful social and cultural force in Western civilisation. In this regard, I seek to follow in the footsteps of Theodor Klauser’s short introduction to Western liturgy, which is still cited as a point of reference in studies from related historical disciplines. Much of Klauser’s historical scholarship needs to be updated and its theological hermeneutic calls for a critical examination. Marcel Metzger’s outline of liturgical history is useful but short and does not give an adequate account of the Roman Mass in the central and later medieval period. There are reference works that introduce the reader to liturgical sources, above all by Cyrille Vogel but also by Éric Palazzo, and I have made ample use of them, but they do not give us the richer picture of a liturgy celebrated and lived.

Two more recent publications need to be mentioned, since they cover some of the same ground as this book but have a different scope and focus. Firstly, I have drawn on the erudition of Bryan Spinks’ historical account of the Eucharistic liturgy in the early Christian period. The medieval development of the Roman Mass is given limited attention in Spinks’ book, since he also deals with Eastern liturgical traditions and Protestant communion rites and takes his narrative up to the current period. Secondly, I have profited much from Helmut Hoping’s study of

the history and theology of the Eucharist, which concentrates on the Roman Mass up to the present day. My approach is less specifically theological than Hoping’s, and I intend to explore to a greater extent the social and cultural contexts that shaped the celebration of the Eucharist in the Roman tradition.

With this initial apologia, I hope to have convinced the reader that this is a propitious moment for a new, synthetic approach to my chosen topic. The last two decades or so have in fact seen seminal contributions to the study and practice of Christian liturgy. In the Roman Catholic context, the impact of the liturgical writings of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) was nothing short of a game-changer. Ratzinger inspired a new generation of scholars to question the prevailing narrative that the Roman liturgy moved from early dynamic development through medieval decline to early modern stagnation. He also encouraged scholars and practitioners alike to reflect critically about twentieth-century liturgical reforms and to articulate their unease about the present state of Catholic worship.

Classical liturgical scholarship in the twentieth century was largely occupied with texts, especially those that have survived in written documents from the late ancient and early medieval periods. Archaeological research furnished additional data for understanding the history of Christian worship, even though the interpretation of its findings is beset with difficulties and hence often contested. More recently, this useful and necessary study has been beneficially supplemented by a renewed focus on the actual celebration or, in terms of social anthropology, the ritual performance of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. Multidisciplinary approaches to the history of the Mass include musical, artistic, literary, social and, more generally, religious perspectives. In the light of such contributions, I propose to present liturgical development within the broader historical and theological context that shaped the celebration and experience of the sacramental rite that is still at the heart of Catholic Christianity.

In the Roman tradition, the Mass is firmly rooted in the words and actions of Jesus ‘on the day before he was betrayed’ (pridie quam...
pateretur), as the Canon of the Mass introduces the words of consecration. Hence, I have found it necessary to begin this book with a critical discussion of the Last Supper tradition and its relation to early Christian Eucharistic practice. These initial two chapters were the most challenging to write and will likely prove the most contentious. Recent scholarship has presented a highly diverse picture of early Christianity, and the origins of the Eucharist have been subjected to radical questioning. On the other hand, it will be seen in Chapter 1 that New Testament exegetes now appear more confident than liturgical historians about the central importance of the Last Supper tradition in shaping the early Christian Eucharist. In the light of this biblical evidence, I find theories untenable that regard the words of institution within Eucharistic prayers as interpolations dating from as late as the fourth century.

Chapter 2 offers a necessarily incomplete discussion of the Eucharist in the first three centuries of the Church. Extant sources are few and far between, and while they offer some answers, they leave us with even more questions. At the same time, I hope to highlight a common thread that runs through them and has its origins in the ‘Temple piety’ that forms the background to primitive Christianity. There is a broad stream of early Christian tradition that saw in the Eucharist the fulfilment of the prophecy of Malachi 1:11 that a pure sacrifice would be offered to God in every place. Thus, the sacred meal that emerged as the heart of Christian worship came to be celebrated as a memorial in which the sacrifice of Christ became present and its saving effects were communicated to those who partook of it. This sacrificial understanding is reflected in the common elements of the earliest Eucharistic prayers that have come down to us. Thus, Chapter 3 continues the narrative with an examination of the earliest available anaphoras that most likely have pre-Nicene origins, and this is followed by a condensed survey of key developments in Eastern liturgical traditions after the Constantinian settlement, especially the formation of the anaphoras of the Antiochene and of the Alexandrian type.

The wider scope of the first three chapters is, I believe, essential for providing the foundation on which the Latin liturgical tradition builds. In Chapter 4, I analyse essential prayer texts that document the formation of Latin as the liturgical language of the Roman Rite from the fourth century onwards. The substantial Chapter 5 examines the ritual structure and shape of the papal stational Mass, which was to become a pattern for subsequent liturgical development in the West. Between the fifth and the early eighth century, an impressive corpus of books was produced that
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codified the texts to be used (sacramentaries, lectionaries, antiphoners) and the performance of the rites (ordines). The Ordines Romani are invaluable and engaging sources for understanding the liturgical shape of the Mass.

This richer flow of liturgical sources must not make us oblivious to the fact that the picture they offer is at best partial and often fragmentary. Victor Leroquais, whose catalogues of liturgical manuscripts are still indispensable for historians, has put this elegantly: ‘Liturgists are a bit like archaeologists: they reconstruct the past with debris and their constructions are necessarily affected by the insufficiency, sometimes even the scarcity, of materials.’ Moreover, the task of interpreting the sources that have come down to us is far from straightforward, as Helen Gittos reminds us: ‘Given the oral nature of the transmission of liturgy in the Middle Ages it is even more important than ever to ask: Why were texts written down?’

Documents we now consider epochal for the history of the Roman Mass, such as Ordo Romanus I, may have been produced in the first place as an aide-mémoire for practical purposes, or as an instrument to correct real and perceived abuses or to reflect order and authority in the papal curia – or indeed for all of these reasons. As the history of the Western liturgy progresses in the long Middle Ages, we can discern a transition from oral to written culture.

Recent contributions from a variety of historical disciplines offer us a better understanding of the multifaceted process of exchange and transformation of Roman and Franco-German traditions in the Carolingian period, which is the topic of Chapter 6. Gallican patrimony was not simply replaced but was to some degree integrated into the Roman Rite. The chapter shows the slow pace and gradual implementation of the Carolingian reforms, their dependence on local initiative, and their focus on education, first of the clergy and, through them, of the people.

At the beginning of the second millennium, the mixed Roman-Frankish rite of Mass was adopted in the city of Rome itself. Chapter 7 examines the genesis of the Ordo Missae as a distinctive set of prayers and rubrics, which would come to exert significant impact upon the ritual shape of the


Mass, especially with the spread of what has come to be known as ‘private Mass’. This chapter also traces the increasing liturgical standardisation that was envisaged in the Gregorian reform movement and effected by the rapidly expanding Franciscan order. Moreover, the profound veneration of the Eucharist at the time brought new elements to the rite of Mass that proved to be very popular, such as the elevation of the consecrated species, and led to the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi.

Medieval liturgical sources are generally prescriptive and convey an idea of how a rite should be celebrated. They do not tell us how the rite actually was carried out on specific occasions. While they claim to have normative force, this does not necessarily mean that their instructions were always followed to the letter. Moreover, in most historical periods, liturgical books are concerned with those who officiated, and this means above all clerics and monks. There is a difference between the rite as performed by liturgical actors and the rite as experienced by the people attending.

The increasing level of literacy in the high Middle Ages initiated a flourishing of historical, pastoral and devotional literature, not only for the clergy but also for the educated laity, which offer us glimpses of ordinary Catholics at worship beyond the prescriptive liturgical sources. These resources will assist us in taking a fresh look at later medieval developments in Chapter 8. In standard textbooks, the period is often seen as marked by decline and corruption. By taking into account various aspects of liturgical life at the time, I intend to show that the overall picture is more complex and that elements of decay and vitality existed side by side. Chapter 9 concludes my narrative with an assessment of the liturgical reforms that followed the Council of Trent (1545–1563). With the Missale Romanum of 1570, a process of codification and standardisation that had been underway for centuries reached its culmination. The four hundred years that followed are rightly called ‘Tridentine’, since they brought only peripheral developments in the structure and shape of the Roman Mass.
I

The Last Supper

For the Christian tradition, the historical connection and continuity of the Eucharist with the Last Supper is essential. As Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) wrote: ‘If Jesus did not give his disciples bread and wine as his body and blood, then the church’s eucharistic celebration is empty – a pious fiction and not a reality at the foundation of communion with God and among men.’ As theologian and pope, Ratzinger made this bold statement fully aware of the strong tendency in recent scholarship to emphasise the diversity of primitive Christianity and to question received positions on the origins of the Eucharist. In this chapter, I propose to approach this vast and challenging field of research by selecting key contributions from New Testament scholars that will help us to reassess the central importance of the Last Supper tradition. This will include a consideration of the date and character of the event itself and of the words of institution and their possible earliest liturgical use.

THE SEARCH FOR EUCHARISTIC ORIGINS

A conventional history of the Eucharist would begin with the Last Supper and its foundational and formative role in early liturgical practice. Thus, Josef Andreas Jungmann asserted with confidence in his classical work on the history of the Roman Rite of Mass: ‘The first Holy Mass was said on

“the same night in which he was betrayed” (1. Cor. 11:23). Contemporary historians are averse to constructing grand narratives, but even a critical scholar, such as Bryan Spinks, is positive about the formative impact of the Last Supper tradition upon the Christian liturgy, at least from the fourth century onwards:

What does seem safe to say is that by the fourth century there emerged from the different geographical areas of Christianity, rites which, by osmosis and because of the emergence of a canon of Scripture, used bread and wine mixed with water, and related these in prayer in some way or other to a sacrifice fulfilled by Jesus in his death, and linking the bread and wine to his body and blood.  

When it comes to the first three centuries, however, liturgical scholars have become increasingly sceptical as to what extent early Christian practice was shaped by the Last Supper tradition. Such doubts are strengthened by the observation that not all the community gatherings often described as Eucharistic contained a remembrance (anamnesis) of the Passion and death of Jesus, nor did they all explicitly evoke the Last Supper through repetition of the words of institution or through the use of bread and wine mixed with water.

The question of early liturgical development is inseparable from the question of the historical authenticity of the biblical testimony. Applying the exegetical methods of form criticism and redaction criticism, Rudolf Bultmann considered the Last Supper narrative in Mark (with Matthew and Luke dependent on it) to be not a historically reliable memory but rather an etiological cult legend. While Jesus did hold a farewell meal with his disciples before his death, what is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels should be considered, in Bultmann’s view, a creation of early Christian communities seeking to explain and legitimise their practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, which had been formed under the impact of Hellenistic meal practice and to which Paul (1 Cor 11) is the oldest witness.  

Among biblical scholars today, Bultmann’s radical scepticism is represented prominently by John D. Crossan and the ‘Jesus Seminar’.  

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2 Uwe Michael Lang, *The Roman Mass*  
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In his influential study entitled *Mass and the Lord’s Supper*, Hans Lietzmann argued for the origins of the Eucharist in a Hellenistic-Jewish context. He identified two types of sacred meal: first, the ‘breaking of the bread’ (see Acts 2:46) in Jerusalem, which was a post-Easter continuation of the table-fellowship begun by Jesus among his disciples during his public ministry, now oriented in joyful expectation of his Second Coming; secondly, the ‘Lord’s Supper’ in remembrance of the death of the Christ, as attested in 1 Corinthians 11, developed in the Hellenists’ community of Antioch and shaped by the Apostle Paul. The subsequent history of the Eucharistic liturgy, according to Lietzmann, shows the reception and adaptation of these two types of sacred meals.6

Constructing a similar hypothesis, the leading liturgical scholar Paul Bradshaw sees the Eucharist as a sacramental celebration emerging at a later stage (even as late as the third century) from the common meal practice of Christians, in which they would experience an eschatological anticipation of the kingdom in remembering the words and deeds of Jesus.7 According to Bradshaw, it was Paul who associated the sayings of Jesus about being fed with his body and his blood—as well as their sacrificial interpretation—with the Last Supper. The words of institution as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels represent a tradition superimposed on the original account of a simple meal.8 This would have been a source of consolation for those who suffered persecution, above all in Rome. It was in that city that the author of Mark would have grafted these words onto an already existing narrative of the Last Supper.

On the other side, exegetes indebted to the Scandinavian school of Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson have argued for the essential


reliability of the canonical Gospels as sources for the historical Jesus. Following rabbinic models, the transmission of religious teachings was guided by well-established methods and techniques, above all memorisation. Following rabbinic models, the transmission of religious teachings was guided by well-established methods and techniques, above all memorisation. According to Riesenfeld, one of the privileged loci wherein the Christ-tradition was handed on was its recitation and proclamation in worship. After strong initial criticism, there now seems to be a growing trend in biblical scholarship towards recognising the validity of the approach of the Scandinavian school, though not of all its claims. Among New Testament exegetes, arguments for the substantial historicity of the Last Supper tradition are viewed more favourably, despite considerable differences as to what exactly this historical nucleus consists of. In recent decades, both New Testament exegetes and historians of early Christian liturgy have sought to understand the Last Supper in the wider context of the meals Jesus held during his public ministry, which are set against the backdrop of contemporary Jewish meal practice as well as the broader framework of table customs in Greco-Roman culture. Thus, Gordon Jeanes claims: ‘If we are to make sense of what the Eucharist is, we need to start with those meals recounted in the New Testament.’

9 In his preface to the republication of two works that originated in the 1960s, Gerhardsson enumerates some of these principles: ‘memorization; the principle “first learn, then understand”; terseness; abridgment of material into short, pregnant texts; poetic artifices; rhythm; cantillation; mnemonic devices; use of written notes; diligent repetition’; Birger Gerhardsson, Memory & Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, with Tradition & Transmission in Early Christianity, with a Foreword by Jacob Neusner, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Livonia: Dove Booksellers, 1998), xii.


12 Above all, Brant Pitre, Jesus and the Last Supper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); also Craig Blomberg, Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005); and Richard Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).