

Interview with Fr. Jackson on His Book—Part I

charistic ministers, and annulments. All other indicators are down. For every ten people that come into the Church in the US, eight walk out. And the culture is worsening here, and the contempt for the Church is I think, growing. But as George Bernanos once wrote, “Optimism and pessimism are from the devil; the only thing that counts is Christian hope.” I agree with this, and think that there is always and everywhere great cause for hope; for union with our good Lord.

Don’t you think that the Mass in Latin may be of little appeal to young people that are no more exposed to this language?

Yes, to some. To some young people, who have been indoctrinated to think that not praying in one’s own tongue is something to be avoided or even bad, yes, they might not want anything to do with it. But to others who have no chip on their shoulders and are open to new things (tradition is brand new to many of them), there is great appeal. My experience so far with the Extraordinary Form is that the appeal is to younger generations, while the older ones, if they practice their faith at all, have no desire to “return” to Latin.

I was interested in seeing that you, differently from other supporters of the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, rely also on the documents of Vatican II to develop your arguments. Am I wrong in saying this?

No, you’re not wrong. Keep in mind that all my training for the priesthood was in seminaries which had the Ordinary Form exclusively, and which presented Vatican II as a kind of Super-Council, which overrode all other councils. It was the only council we really studied. So I’m familiar with the documents, and assume that many of my readers are as well. I deny that there is any here-

sy in any of the documents, but I am critical of some of them nonetheless.

I quote: “The question of what is not legitimate development is a larger question than this little work can address. But a guiding principle may be taken from Vatican II, which said that no change was to be made to the liturgy unless it could be demonstrated that the change would be of positive benefit to the faithful.” So according to your opinion, what is legitimate development and what isn’t?

The word “organic” is crucial in thinking about the liturgy. On the positive side of this notion is whether or not the development really “fits” the liturgy. An example of this is I think the addition of St Joseph’s name to the Roman Canon by St. John XXIII. He fits right in with the saints already mentioned.

On the negative side (to quote Archbishop Ranjith), “There are the problems of antiquarianism, anthropologism, confusion of roles between the ordained and the non-ordained, a limitless provision of space for experimentation — and, indeed, the tendency to look down on some aspects of the development of the liturgy in the second millennium — were increasingly visible among certain liturgical schools. Liturgists had also tended to pick and choose sections of Sacrosanctum Concilium that seemed to be more accommodating to change or novelty, while ignoring others. Besides, there was a great sense of hurry to effect and legalize changes. Much space tended to be provided for a rather horizontalist way of looking at the liturgy. Norms of the council that tended to restrict such creativity or that were favorable to the traditional way seemed to be ignored.” Thus, going back to another age to find a favorite practice and bringing it willy-nilly into our times is not organic, but artificial.

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There is an interesting book about the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite (it would be very useful also for those celebrating in the ordinary form): Father James Jackson’s *Nothing Superfluous*. An Explanation of the Symbolism of the Rite of St Gregory the Great (Redbrush 2016). It makes for great reading, written with the accessible style of Father Jackson.

Father, you are a member of the Fraternity of Saint Peter. Can you explain the origins of this religious congregation and its current status?

We were founded in the midst of a crisis; the condition of the seminaries in 1988 was grim, and our founders were members of the Society of St Pius X, who responded to the crisis by creating a Society of Apostolic Life. The situation of the Society regarding the Holy See became increasingly difficult for our founders, but ultimately they could not accept the consecrations of bishops without Papal mandate. We have as a motto, “Qui seminant in lacrymis, in exultatione metent” – “Those who sow in tears shall reap in exultation.” We can’t say that the crisis has passed, but we believe that the safest passage through this long trial is to be faithful to Tradition, yet in complete canonical union with the Holy See. Currently then, we are a Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical Right.

Why this book about the Mass?

I am a convert to the Catholic Faith, and never knew the Rite of St Gregory growing up. All my training and experience was with the 1970 Roman Missal. So when I had parishioners asking me things like “Why does the priest do this in the Mass?” I rarely

knew a good answer, except to reply with some history about how the practice developed. That is quite useful to be sure, but the history does not give any real meaning to the action. So when I turned to the medieval theologians – especially beginning with St Albert the Great – they had explanations which were intriguing, poetic, beautiful and quite useful. So I started to write bulletin inserts on what I was finding in my research and they started to accumulate, which led a parishioner to suggest turning them into a book. I thought that such a book must exist already, but I could not find one; a book that could take a parishioner through the Mass from start to finish and give a reason as to why the Mass is celebrated as it is. So I proceeded, and I think it fills a need.

You wrote, “The world has turned away from God’s transcendence. And we are living perhaps in the beginning of the great apostasy spoken of in the Scriptures. In this country alone, Catholic apostates (from a Greek word meaning ‘to stand outside of’) are the second largest denomination after practicing Catholics. We are not immune from the fallen world in which we live, and the state of this world is worse than the old paganism, because the ancient pagans rejected Christ from ignorance, and modern pagans reject Him from contempt.” Don’t you think this is very pessimistic?

It may well be very pessimistic. But the first thing I was hoping to write about was the truth. And the truth is that in the US and in many other countries besides, the figures are not good. Since the promulgation of the new missal, there are only three areas of growth (using leading Catholic indicators), and they are in permanent deacons, lay Eu-