

The Carthusian Liturgy by a Carthusian Monk

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[Source](#)

by Shawn Tribe

I discovered this piece on the Carthusian liturgy by way of a footnoted reference in Archdale King's *The Liturgies of the Religious Orders*. The original three part article was published in the liturgical journal, *Magnificat* from the mid-20th century, being written by an English Carthusian of Parkminster.

I wrote to Parkminster and a monk there very kindly sent me a photocopy of the three journals in which the article was found and I thought I would take the time to transcribe the last two of three parts which focuses on some of the specifics of the Carthusian liturgy.

Here then is the 2nd and 3rd part of three parts, wherein our Carthusian Monk focuses upon the Carthusian rite of Mass. Part one, not quoted here, considered some of the background of the Carthusian liturgy as founded in the Carthusian way of life.

Apologies in advance for the length of this piece, but to preserve the integrity of the original publication, it seemed better to keep these two parts together.

For those interested in liturgical history, comparative liturgics and ceremonial matters, I can only recommend you dig your way through the piece for there is a great deal to be found within, including some very interesting details of Carthusian liturgical ceremonial.

THE CARTHUSIAN LITURGY: The Mass

by a Monk of Parkminster

Parts Two and Three

In a former article (Vol II. No. 12) an account was given of the sources of the Carthusian liturgy, of the mode of life which has formed its distinctive character, and of the spirit which has preserved it unaltered. The aim of the present article is to offer an impression of Mass in the Charterhouse, not so much by a description of it, but rather by directing attention to its special mark of simplicity -- a simplicity based on a definite simplification and maintained by a continuity averse to either change or addition.

The Carthusian manner of offering Mass arose in this way: in the year 1084, St. Bruno and his six companions seeking to serve God in solitude were led by Him to the desert of La Chartreuse, in the diocese of Grenoble. As was but natural, the little Community began to offer Mass according to the custom of the place, adapting the ritual to suit that particular kind of monastic life to which they had been called. Together with the neighbouring sees, Die Valence and Vienne, Grenoble followed the rite of Lyons, the primatial See of Gaul; this rite, after many vicissitudes, still flourishes in the archdiocese of Lyons.

The coming of the Faith to Lyons is linked with the names of two martyred Bishops. St. Pothinus (+177) and St. Irenaeus (+202). Since both had been sent by St. Polycarp, whose disciples they were, and since he himself was a disciple of the Beloved Disciple, the belief arose that the original rite of Lyons was from Ephesus, and was therefore Oriental and not Western. This conclusion could not really be true since for the first three centuries of the Church's life, there had been no way of celebrating Mass in either East or West sufficiently formed and fixed to be called a "rite". Be that as it may, at the particular time with which we are concerned, namely, the end of the eleventh century, Lyons was tenaciously holding to that liturgy which had been imposed by Charlemagne on his Empire three hundred years before.

Determined to be rid of the chaos in liturgical matters which was rampant throughout his dominions, the Emperor had sent to Pope Hadrian I for the Sacramentary of the Roman Church, which St. Gregory had revised at the end of the sixth century. The book, however, did not prove to be altogether to Charlemagne's liking. He therefore appointed the great scholar Alcuin, a native of York and in his service, to make additions to the work of St. Gregory. This Alcuin did by adding a supplement, taking his material from the earlier Roman Sacramentaries and from the Mass books of Gaul. In the year 799, Leidrade was sent to Lyons as Bishop, commissioned by the Emperor to begin reform in that city. It really was a new beginning. Though only 199 years had passed since St. Augustine of Canterbury had been consecrated there, in the golden age of the Gallican rite, Leidrade found a cathedral in ruins -- a symbol of the work before him. In the Bishop's train was a chanter from Metz, expert in the Roman chant. Agobard, Leidrade's successor, to whose zeal for the preservation of the purity of the liturgical text reference had been made in the former article, and Florus the Deacon, a theologian and liturgical scholar of repute, by their work in the ninth century laid so strong a foundation that when, after the death of Charlemagne, the other churches of Gaul revived more and more of their former customs, Lyons remained constant. Such then is the origin of the rite which was adapted to suit a life of solitude lived in community, and which became the basis of the Carthusian rite. Secondary influences came from neighbouring churches and monasteries, especially the famous abbey of Cluny, founded at the beginning of the previous century, with the monks of which there arose a great friendship.

After this brief glance at its origin we may turn our attention to the Mass itself. The church in a Charterhouse consists of the sanctuary, two choirs -- one for the Fathers and the other for the Brothers, separated by a rood screen. There is no nave, for there is no "congregation". The altar stands away from the wall; the tabernacle, which is unveiled, contains only three small Hosts, wrapped in a small corporal and placed in a ciborium. Thus the Blessed Sacrament is reserved only for the sick;

others never receive Holy Communion from the tabernacle, but always by a Host consecrated at the Mass at which they are assisting. On the Epistle side of the sanctuary is the cathedra for the priest; opposite to this and adjoining the wall on the other side, is the Gospel lectern. Three lamps hang in the church: one in the sanctuary and one in each choir. That in the Brothers' choir is lit only when they are present, because even to this day the primary use of such lamps is to give light and to provide means for lighting a taper.

A visitor who attends Conventual Mass will always recall the picture of one standing alone at the altar with arms lifted up and outstretched "in modum Crucifixi". Then it is remembered that the Priest is alone not merely at the altar but in the whole sanctuary as well. The impression is a true one and the lack of ceremonial is most striking: there are neither acolytes nor servers of any kind, nor is there a Subdeacon; the Epistle is sung at the choir-lectern by a monk clad in his ordinary habit, the Deacon only goes to the sanctuary when he has something to do there, which is not often and for the rest he remains in the stalls. On days when incense is used, the Procurator presents the thurible to the Priest for the incense, but he leaves the sanctuary immediately and incenses the Gospel-book from below the sanctuary steps. Only the Priest may remain in the sanctuary -- this absence of ceremonial undesignedly stress the holiness of God.

The Carthusians wear no special cowl in choir, but one similar in shape to the choir-cowl of the other monks and of white material is worn by both the Priest and the Deacon. In this cowl, and without vestments of any kind, the Deacon performs his office; he wears a stole when he sings the Gospel, and a "syndon" (which is like a humeral veil without strings, worn on the left shoulder -- its ancient name was manutergium which shows its original use), when he offers the oblata to the Priest, and at the "Changing of the Hosts" (to be explained later), and when receiving Holy Communion. The Priest's vestments are as usual, but a cope is never worn. When at the cathedra and even when standing, the Priest holds a "mappula" (gremiale). The stole is not crossed

(Footnote: Those interested in liturgical history may like to know that the stole was crossed until the year 1281, in which year the General Chapter decided that "for the future, the Order's custom of crossing the stole would be discontinued for the sake of uniformity" -- presumably with the world outside, which, however, later changed its practice.) but when he performs some ceremony for which, though vested, he does not wear the chasuble, he loops the ends of the girdle over the ends of the stole. The vestments are not kissed, neither are there any prayers said when vesting. It may be remarked here that the Priest's hand is kissed only twice during the whole Mass (which would surely please the late Dr. Fortescue) -- when the Deacon gives him the chalice at the Offertory and the thurible for the incensation which follows. The Priest kisses the altar only at the beginning and the end of Mass, at *Et Homo factus est* when the Credo is sung, at the *Supplices*, and before kissing the "instrumentum pacis" if the "Pax" is given; the Gospel-book, even at Masses for the Dead, after the singing of the Gospel -- other things are never kissed.

The Priest, assisted by the Deacon, vests at the altar and unvests behind it, unless part of the Divine Office is sung in choir before or after Mass, in which event the Vestry is used; but, in any case, apart from two or three occasions in the year, the chasuble is always put on in the sanctuary. Before vesting and after unvesting the Priest prostrates before the altar and says a *Pater* and an *Ave*. There are no other set prayers for Preparation or Thanksgiving. The *Ave* was added in 1589 because of a decision that whenever a *Pater* was said secretly in any Office, an *Ave* too was to be added. In the prostration the body lies on the side and rests on the elbows: this prostration is made by the Community in the stalls at *Et Homo factus est* in the Credo, after the Elevation of the Sacred Host until the end of the Consecration, and at the Priest's communion.

On Sundays, the Blessing of the Water precedes Terce and Conventual Mass, and is chanted by the priest at the choir-lectern. He is fully vested except for the chasuble, and wears the maniple. He makes a complete circuit of the sanctuary, passing behind

the altar and sprinkles as he goes. There is only one melody for *Asperges me* -- the same as No. II of the "Alii Cantus ad lib." in the Vatican Graduale. Never is there a *Gloria Patri*, and *Vidi aquam* is unknown. As the priest moves through the choir, all bow to him but he to none "propter Personam quam tunc repraesentat".

The preparation of the altar will be of interest: it is only uncovered when needed, and is covered again immediately after the *Placeat*. When the priest has vested or towards the end of the Little Hour, if one is being sung, the Priest and Deacon fold back the altar cover. There are the usual altar-cloths and also a purificator for use before the Consecration. The Deacon places a cushion on the Gospel side as a rest for the missal during the Canon; he places the missal flat on the Epistle side and lights two candles or, on Solemnities, four or six. There are no altar cards. The use of candles can be traced from the time when only one candle in a lantern was placed on the altar, a custom which survives today at the Blessing of Candles on Candlemas Day. The missal and Gospel-book have cloth covers sufficiently long to enable the books to lie open and yet be covered when not in actual use -- a survival of the days of manuscripts and the care taken of them. The original custom exists still on Good Friday, when two cloths are placed on the altar, one on each side, as covers for the missal. Later it was found more convenient to have one cover attached to the book itself.

Regarding the music of the Mass, there is no "schola" or special group of singers, but all the Fathers take their share in all the parts of the chant. There is never an accompaniment, since musical instruments of any kind are forbidden in the Charterhouse. The Mass is always sung in full; there is never any question of monotoning, or in any other way shortening, the longest *Responsorium* or *Tractus*. The music of the Ordinary of the Mass, however, is very simple. There are only three melodies for the *Kyrie eleison*: versions similar to No. XV in the Vatican Graduale for solemnities and to XVI for Sundays and Feasts, with a yet more simple one for other days and Masses for the Dead; two melodies for the *Gloria in excelsis*; a version similar to No. XI for Solemnities

and to XV for Sundays and Feast; one melody for the Credo, like No. 1; two melodies for the Sanctus; one similar to No. XV for Solemnities and a simpler form of No. XVIII for Feasts, other days and Masses for the Dead; two melodies for the Agnus Dei; one for Solemnities with parts similar to No. XV and XVIII, and one, a simple form of XVIII, for all other days and Masses for the Dead. The Sanctus and Benedictus are always sung as one whole.

[Part 3]

Finally, we shall consider some parts of the Carthusian Mass in detail. The reader will be able to note, by contrast, what was still unfixed in the Roman Mass prior to the missal of St. Pius V in 1570, and how the absence of "incidental" prayers and additions has preserved a primitive simplicity.

The Confession before Conventual Mass is sung on a monotone with a flex, by Priest and Conventus. For this the Priest stands near the Gospel-lectern, facing across the sanctuary. (Footnote: In making the Sign of the Cross, whether upon oneself or things, the thumb and the first two fingers are fully extended, and the remaining two fingers are bent upon the palm of the hand.) "Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo. --Et ostium circumstantiae labiis meis. Confiteor Deo, et Beatae Mariae et omnibus Sanctis, et vobis Fratres, quia peccavi nimis mea culpa per superbiam, cogitatione, locutione, opere et omissione, precor vos orate pro me. --Misereatur tui omnipotens Deus, per intercessionem Beatae Mariae et omnium Sanctorum, et dimittat tibi omnia peccata tua, et perducat ad vitam aeternam. --Amen. Confiteor, etc. --Misereatur etc. --Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domine. --Qui fecit coelum et terram." And that is all. The Priest then goes before the altar, bows profoundly and says a Pater and Ave; goes up the steps, kisses the altar, saying nothing all the while; makes the Sign of the Cross and goes to the missal. A psalm never formed part of the preparation, which is the same on all occasions. It is always used -- even at the beginning of the Morning Offices on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and before the Blessing of Palms, Candles, etc. At private Masses the form was originally in the singular, if the Priest and server were alone, as is

shown by a direction in the twelfth century which runs that if a Priest knows that Brother Cook or somebody else is present, he is to say: Vobis Fratres and Misereatur vestri. It was only in 1509 that it was deprived of its private character and the use of plural became compulsory. Incense is never used until the Gospel. Gloria in excelsis Deo, Dominus vobiscum and the Collects are all sung at the Epistle side of the altar, and the Priest remains there standing. He does not bow to the Cross at Oremus or at the Holy Name, but straight in front. We may note in passing the variants: propter gloriam tuam magnam in the Gloria, and vitam futuri seculi in the Credo. (Footnote: The latter is the translation of Dionysius Exiguus, c. 500 A.D.)

Having sung the Collects, the Priest carries the missal to the Gospel side, places it open on the cushion, covers it and goes to the Cathedra. The Deacon offers him the book containing the Epistles, Responsorial, etc., in case he may wish to have them before his eyes while they are being sung in Choir. If the Credo is not sung, the Deacon prepares the oblata during this time, and otherwise he does so during the Credo. Having prepared and covered the Gospel book at the lectern, the Deacon comes to the Priest with the stole, and holding it extended says: Jube, Domine, benedicere. the Priest replies: Dominus sit in corde tuo et in labiis tuis ut recte nobis pronunties Evangelium pacis. Then taking on end of the stole he places it on the Deacon's left shoulder, brings it round the back and under the right arm across the front, and hangs it over the left arm like a maniple; the other end hangs free from the left shoulder. The Deacon goes to the altar and kisses it, and sings the Gospel at the lectern. Because there is only one figure in motion, there is given to that simple silent action a power which heightens its symbolism. While the Gospel is being sung, the Priest stands at the Cathedra holding the mappula.

Surely it is wonderful, and certainly unique today, that the Priest at Conventual Mass does not say the Epistle and Gospel; that the strange doubling of parts seen elsewhere, caused by the priest saying everybody's part at High Mass (as he must do at Low Mass), does not take place in the Carthusian rite -- although since 1582 the Priest at Conventual

Mass must say the Introit, Kyrie, Agnus Dei, Offertory and Communion.

At the Offertory, the Priest's hands are washed before the Deacon presents him with the corporal, and, if the thurible is used, they are washed a second time. The Priest goes to the Epistle side of the altar to receive the prepared chalice with the paten and host upon it. The Deacon adds the water with a spoon while the Priest says: *De Latere Domini nostri Jesu Christi exivit Sanguis et aqua, in remissionem peccatorum. In nomine Patris, etc.*, and makes the Sign of the Cross over the bread and wine together. This is the only occasion in the Carthusian Mass, excluding the Canon, that the Priest gives a blessing with his hand, and it happens to be a later addition. The original custom was for him to say *De latere... peccatorum*, and then, if a Bishop was present, to turn, holding the chalice, towards his Lordship, who then blessed it. It was only in the sixteenth century that the Priest was directed to do it himself. The bread and wine are offered together, with one prayer only, namely, *In spiritu humilitatis*; and none of the other prayers in the Roman missal are said. A pall is not used, for the corporal is large enough to be drawn forward from behind and to cover the oblata. (Footnote: At Low Mass the host is put on the paten and the wine into the chalice before Mass begins, but the water is always added at the Offertory. Until then the chalice is not placed on the corporal, because it is considered as not yet on the altar; consequently there is no chalice veil, for the chalice is, in theory, still in the credence cupboard.) The incensation takes place thus: holding the thurible over the oblata, the Priest says: *Dirigatur ... tuo; ...* then saying *In nomine Patris, etc.* he makes the Sign of the Cross and a circle once, followed by one swing to the Cross and one to each side. He then holds the thurible at full length and gives three swings in front of the altar and parallel with it. The Deacon now takes the thurible and holding it at full length, makes a complete circle around the altar, incensing in the direction in which he is walking, pausing in the middle of the altar, both before and behind, to incense three times toward the Blessed Sacrament. As the Priest turns and says: *Orate, Fratres, pro me peccatore, ad Dominum Deum nostrum*, to which there is no reply, the Deacon raises the front of the

chasuble with one hand and with the other incenses the Priest with one swing of the thurible. The Priest alone is incensed during Mass, and that on this occasion.

The Consecration and Elevation are of special interest, for they preserve a transitional stage common at one time to the Western Church, i.e. when there was no Elevation of the Chalice, and when genuflection to the Blessed Sacrament was first introduced. A Carthusian never genuflects but makes a profound bow, as was the ancient custom. In the Church as a whole there was an utmost universal absence of genuflection down to the end of the fifteenth century. In the Carthusian order a practice grew up during the fourteenth century of bending the knee, but not to the ground, before elevating the Sacred Host. It is during the course of the twelfth century that the Elevation of the Sacred Host is found in the Roman missal; in the Carthusian order the first ruling concerning it is in the year 1222. The Elevation of the Chalice is not found in the Church until the fourteenth century; what priests did until that time was to hold the Chalice in their hands until the *Unde et memores*; this is what the Carthusians still do. In any case, the fact that the chalice is even then partially covered by the corporal would make an elevation of it impossible. At the end of the sixteenth century there was introduced the present practice of bending both knees slightly after the words of Consecration, while still holding the Chalice. The Deacon meanwhile kneels behind the Priest holding a torch -- a practice introduced at the beginning of the thirteenth century in order that the Sacred Host might be seen on dark mornings. Then when the Priest finally places the Chalice on the altar and bows, the Deacon bows with him, stamps his foot as the signal for the *Conventus* to rise from prostration (there is no bell on the Sanctuary), puts the torch away and goes to his place in the stalls. The Carthusian missal has *Unde et memores nos tui servi*, which is the original text.

The "Little Elevation" takes place at the words *Per omnia secula seculorum*, and the two Signs of the Cross made with the Sacred Host between the Priest and the Chalice are missing. A similar elevation with the *Fragmentum* and the Chalice is

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made at the Per omnia before the Pax Domini -- a survival of the old Gallican custom of elevating after the Pater. Haec commixtio and all the other prayers are unknown. Agnus Dei is sung once at this point, and twice after the Priest's communion. Since the year 1319, "instrumentum pacis" have been used for giving the Pax. There is only one prayer before Communion, similar to the second one in the Roman missal. The Confiteor is not said before Holy Communion is given, nor is there an Absolution or Domine non sum dignus, etc. There are no prayers for the ablutions and the corporal is purified after the first ablution has been taken. (Footnote: The first ablution is as usual, but in the second, only the wine is poured over the priest's fingers into the chalice, the water being poured into a dish and then into the piscina. The chalice is laid on its side on the paten and a few drops thus collected are drunk by the priest, who then dries his lips with a special cloth known as the "Agnus Dei", the same with which he has dried his fingers after the second ablution. The chalice is not dried at the altar.) After carrying the missal across, and removing the cushion, the Deacon purifies the chalice with water at the piscina during the Post-communion. (Footnote: At Low Mass this is done by the Priest at the piscina, after he has unvested.) The Conventus, having answered Deo gratias to Ite Missa est sung by the Deacon, makes the Sign of the Cross and leaves the church. The Priest says the Placeat and covers the altar assisted by the Deacon, who then puts the candles out and helps the Priest unvest.

A word of explanation was promised regarding the "Changing of the Hosts". As has been already stated, only three small Hosts are reserved in the Tabernacle, as Viaticum for the sick. Before the days of small Hosts, there was but one large one reserved, of which a part was broken off as needed. As Sundays, the Deacon received this Host in Holy Communion, and another was placed in the Capsula in its stead. On Solemnities during the week, he received part of the Host of the Mass. Today, the Hosts are changed every fortnight, the Deacon, if such be his state, receiving one, and the Priest the remainder.

-- A Monk of Parkminster