

The return of the Latin Mass

Nigel Bernard

Latin became the official language of the Roman Catholic Church, and it helped unite the Holy Roman Empire. In the 1960s, however, the use of the Latin Mass was replaced by rites in local languages. There are reports that Pope Benedict XVI plans to issue a decree in favour of the Latin Mass. This would emphasise the Roman roots of the Beast of Revelation 17.

IN DEUTERONOMY 28 Moses prophesied of a nation which would one day come against Israel: “The LORD [Yahweh] shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand” (v. 49). This nation was the Roman Empire, and the “tongue” which it spoke was Latin. This language would be used during the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus: “And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Lk. 23:38).

Latin would later become the official language of the Roman Catholic Church. As the historian Derek Wilson shows, the language would also be used by Charlemagne (Charles the Great) to consolidate what would become the Holy Roman Empire:

“. . . the revival of classical studies and the educational reforms that Charles set in hand were not ends in themselves, but must be seen in the light of his desire to establish a Christian empire. The copying and dissemination of books, the establishing of schools and the encouraging of a better understanding of Latin were all elements of a crusade to produce a corpus of clergy who could preach, properly administer the sacraments and staff the imperial administration”.¹

The numerical value of the Greek letters used to spell *Lateinos*, which refers to the Latin kingdom, add up to 666, and this is one possible interpretation of Revelation 13:18: “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six”.

The Council of Trent

The Council of Trent was convened in the Italian city of that name by Pope Paul III in 1545. It was

the nineteenth council of the Roman Catholic Church. Its purpose was primarily to counteract the effects of the Protestant Reformation. Paul III died in 1549, but the Council continued under succeeding popes, finally ending in 1563.

One of the actions of the Council was the codification of the Latin Mass.

This was later formalised in a Papal Bull decreed by Pope Pius V in 1570. This Mass is sometimes known as the Tridentine Mass, named after Tridentum, the Latin name for Trent.

The mass in the vernacular

Between 1962 and 1965 the twenty-first council was held. Known as Vatican II, this council is viewed as having been being pastoral rather than putting forward new dogma. However, it did mark a break with the past with the bringing in of updated liturgy in the vernacular rather than Latin. This was a controversial move. A French archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre, was later excommunicated for his opposition to Vatican II.

The replacement of the Latin Mass with masses held in local languages also raised concerns amongst intellectuals, both Catholics and non-Catholics. It was seen as a threat to culture as a whole. In 1971 in Britain a group of intellectuals signed a letter addressed to the then pope, Paul VI, protesting at the demise of the Latin Mass. The writer Dennis Sewell takes up the story:

“Any one of the names of the writers, poets, musicians and thinkers whose signatures were appended might have struck the Pope as impressive. But Paul VI was a devotee of the classic detective novel. On reaching Agatha Christie, he abandoned his perusal of the list, and with a shrug, instructed his officials to draw up an indult [a grant by the pope allowing a specific deviation from the normal practice] permitting the continued use of the Tridentine Rite in Britain”.²

1. Wilson, D. (2006), *Charlemagne—Barbarian and Emperor*, London, Pimlico, p. 116.
2. Sewell, D. (2002), *Catholics—Britain’s largest minority*, London, Penguin, p. 160.



Pope Benedict XVI, pictured when he was Cardinal Ratzinger, before he became pope in April 2005.

To this day, Latin services are held in Britain at locations such as Westminster Cathedral. There is, however, the prospect of the Latin Mass being formally restored by the current pope.

The Latin Mass to be restored?

According to the journalist John Follain, "Pope Benedict XVI plans to bring back the celebration of mass in Latin, overriding a rare show of protest from senior cardinals".³ He apparently

plans to issue a decree known as a *motu proprio*, which means 'on his own initiative'. Such a decree does not need approval from cardinals. Follain states that "The decree would officially declare the Latin, or Tridentine, mass an 'extraordinary universal rite', and the vernacular mass, with which most Catholics are familiar, an 'ordinary universal rite'".

Conclusion

In Revelation 17, the opposition of the Catholic European nations to Christ once he is King in Jerusalem is prophesied: "These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them" (vv. 13,14). Yet this Roman beast is linked by the Spirit with the Roman power that existed at the time of John: "And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (v. 18). The return to the Latin Mass would renew and strengthen the link with the nation "from far" which ruled over the Mediterranean world at that time, with its language which the Jews did "not understand" (Deut. 28:49).

3. Follain, J. (2007), "Pope to restore mass in Latin", *The Sunday Times*, 11 Mar., p. 26.

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