The Riches of the Sarum Rite

Seán Finne [gan1]

Why the Sarum Rite?

Well, to begin with, because everyone here is interested in the liturgy. But it is not my intention for this talk to be a mere exercise in liturgical archaeology. Rather, I believe that knowledge of this subject and others like it can and should be essential to any future attempt at liturgical reform. So I am not suggesting that the Sarum Rite is the only key to our liturgical future, but that it can teach us something, as I shall discuss in this talk, and in any case, it is a fine example of its kind.

The name Sir Winston Churchill is familiar to you all; what is less well known is that in his spare time he devoted himself to painting and that he was a recognised historian. In a speech in March 1944, he stated the following: 'I confess that I am a great admirer of tradition. The further back you can look, the further forward you will see.' If we believe (as surely everyone here does) that our liturgy should grow *organically* rather than be designed from scratch, the study of earlier forms of the liturgy – by which I mean those preceding the *Missale Romanum* of 1570 – is essential to understanding why the liturgy we celebrate today, whether in the extraordinary or ordinary form, has come to be what it is, and how it can develop without losing its intrinsic character. During the Reformation and again in our own day, there has been an exaggerated extrapolation of a liturgy corresponding to a hypothetical early church (whatever that may be understood to mean) directly to the present. In a letter, Tolkien elaborated on an image used by St John Henry Newman in his **Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine**: it is as if we were to consider an acorn that we cannot even see to be intrinsically better than the mature oak into which it has grown, and were to cut down the oak in the hope of finding the original acorn. Such an endeavour is meaningless and could hardly yield anything useful. We must understand the *entire* journey that the Sacred Liturgy has undertaken, not merely the point from which *we imagine* it began. If we study the signposts along the way, we will be able to orient ourselves far better to gain an insight into the early days of the liturgy, rather than regarding the immature form as intrinsically better than the mature one—a highly questionable assumption.

Why, then, not simply study the extraordinary form of the liturgy as it stood in 1570 or even in 1962, for example? Well, as the eminent musicologist László Dobszay has observed, the extraordinary form of the liturgy is not, in fact, the ancient Roman Rite, but an edited version intended for use by the Papal Curia and the Papal Chapel, substantially reduced in its complexity and solemnity. Dobszay remarked that if one wishes to understand the ancient and time-honoured Western rite, one must, in fact, examine all the variants of the liturgy that existed in the Middle Ages and identify common texts and practices. In the same work, he writes: 'The traditional Roman liturgy can

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be found in what is *common* to them, despite the *changes* on the surface.' The fact that these rites are variants means that we will find differences, sometimes substantial ones, between them. But there are also elements common to almost all of them, and even to all of them, which are not typical of the ordinary or extraordinary form of the Mass today.

To take two random examples: the position of the celebrant's arms *in modo crucis* after the consecration and the procession to the baptismal font during Vespers on Easter Sunday are both classic elements of the Roman Rite which have not been preserved in either the ordinary or the extraordinary form, but only in the medieval variants of the Roman Rite.

One might debate the exact difference between a rite and a usage, but for the purposes of this discussion, I would like us to consider that the family of Roman-style ceremonies constitutes the Roman Rite as the hallmark of an all-encompassing family, whilst we shall refer to the variants of that Rite—the members of the family, if you will—such as the Dominican, Sarum, Freising, Nidaros and Paris rites, etc., as 'Uses' or 'Customs'. It might be worth adding that these ceremonies are not limited simply to the Holy Mass, but also encompass the administration of all the sacraments and sacramentals, and, in some cases, such as the Sarum Rite, may even extend to the domestic arrangements of the clergy who use these rites.

As we all know, following the Council of Trent, only the most robust of these Usages have continued to develop over the centuries. The Ambrosian Rite, reformed by St Charles Borromeo, and the Rite of Lyon have survived in good health. Others, such as that of Braga, have endured with less success, but were still in use in the 20th century. Many others, such as that of Freising, were abandoned—with varying degrees of reluctance—and replaced by the Roman Curia's Rite, as permitted by **Quo Primum**. Others, such as those of Nidaros or Sarum, declined or disappeared entirely with the Protestant Reformation. Many French dioceses preserved their own rites right up to the modern era, aided, no doubt, by the tradition of Gallicanism; in many, if not all, cases, these rites were considerably revised during the Jansenist period and, with few exceptions—such as that of Lyon—were completely discarded in the nineteenth century, largely due to the burgeoning Ultramontane movement.

In the 20th century, several religious orders, encouraged by the Liturgical Movement, revived their own rites with notable success on more than a few occasions. Among others, in addition to the Dominican and Carthusian rites—which, I believe, never truly disappeared—the Cistercian and Carmelite rites also experienced an impressive revival.

Finally, despite the vigour of the Liturgical Movement, the unthinkable happened. With the publication of *the* *Nov*us Ordo Missæ** in 1969, almost all these local and religious rites simply disappeared. Lyon, Braga, the Dominicans, the Carmelites, the Cistercians, the Premonstratensians, and no doubt others besides, were relegated to the status of museum pieces. Even Toledo, Milan and the Carthusians have amended their own missals in keeping with the spirit of the 1969 Roman Missal – although the Toledo rite has retained its distinctive character far more strongly. I believe there is a growing realisation that this distortion was a mistake. Celebrations of the Dominican Rite are on the increase, though I do not believe there are many more. A Cistercian monastery in Germany, which had revived its rite, was closed, if I am not mistaken.

So, returning to my question: why the Sarum Rite? Why this variant and not another? There are many answers, and the first is, quite simply, that it is the one I know best. I am currently preparing an altar missal, a copy of which I have here. But the Sarum Rite also has great intrinsic value, which I shall explain briefly.

History of the Sarum Rite

The 'Sarum Rite' is the variant of the Roman Rite most widely used in the British Isles, from the time of the Normans' arrival in England in the 11th century until the 16th century. It is believed that the Sarum Rite derives largely from the Rouen Rite, although over the centuries it acquired its own authenticity and character, which earned it widespread admiration. In turn, it is believed to have influenced the creation of the Dominican Rite, the Nidaros Rite and, possibly, the Braga Rite, thanks to a Portuguese princess who married a member of the Portuguese royal family and retained her own chapel.

Saint Osmund is generally regarded as the 'Father' of the Sarum Rite; he accompanied William the Conqueror to England in 1066 and became Chancellor of England a few years later. In 1075, the new diocese of Salisbury or Sarum (the names are interchangeable) was established, and in 1078, Osmund became its second bishop, a position he held until his death in 1099; he was canonised in 1457. The Normans were determined to leave their mark on England, and with remarkable speed set about building grand stone cathedrals and large-scale castles, both to impress and to pacify the Anglo-Saxons they had conquered. Thus, Sarum, Salisbury, boasted both a castle and a cathedral. When we think of St Osmund's Salisbury, we must not picture today's city, which is of a later period. Norman Salisbury was situated 3 km from its present location and was a defensive stronghold with a massive castle built in 1070, which stood under the direct authority of the Norman kings. The site was inhospitable and, after just over a century, was abandoned in favour of the present-day location. 'Old Sarum', as it was known, consisted simply of a fortress and a cathedral – a rather unlikely combination – and once the move to New Sarum, modern-day Salisbury, had taken place, everything was abandoned at the old site, which today consists only of ruins.

In a cathedral such as Sarum's, there was a considerable—and at times *very* large—group of clergy whose purpose was to sing the services and celebrate Mass with the greatest possible solemnity, whether or not laypeople were present. Over time, the manner in which the liturgy – that is, the services and Mass – was celebrated in Salisbury grew in splendour and complexity, and came to be greatly admired and imitated. Thus was born the Sarum Rite, which simply means the way in which the liturgy is celebrated in Salisbury. As other cathedrals and dioceses wished to imitate the Salisbury method, the clergy of Salisbury began to carefully record how things were done there, which is why we know so much about the Sarum Rite; whereas in other places, customs were passed down orally, so that information was lost along with the individuals when these customs ceased to be a living tradition.

One problem we face, owing to the immense reverence for liturgical tradition typical of those days, is that whilst the Sarum Missal contains detailed rubrics for the Solemn Mass, each edition of the Missal reproduces exactly the same chaotic structure that had developed over time. No one seems to have wanted to take the trouble to bring order to the Sarum Missal. Until I did. Although tediously precise in some cases, in others the Sarum Missal can be frustratingly laconic. We know exactly which pew the cleric singing the Gradual should sit in during the rest of the liturgical service, and whether he should wear a *cappa nigra* or a *cappa serica* whilst singing it; but it is very difficult to ascertain at what point the water and wine should be placed in the chalice during the recited Mass. I have now found this out, but it took me a long search and I discovered it quite by chance.

Like all other rites, the Sarum Rite has its Breviary and its Missal, along with other important books, such as the Gradual for the chants. But this is only the beginning. There are also many more detailed liturgical books; the *Ordinale* and the *Tonale* for the offices, the *Processionale* and also the *Consuetudinary*, all of which explain in detail what is to be done and by whom, defining the various ranks of clergy and assigning them roles according to their seniority and the solemnity of the feast, often including diagrams showing exactly where the ministers should stand at different moments of the liturgy.

Thus, wherever the Sarum Rite was celebrated, the model was the solemn liturgy as celebrated in Salisbury. All other places were expected to approximate this as closely as possible. Until recent centuries, a similar principle underlay most of the liturgy.

Beyond Salisbury itself, it does not appear that every church felt the need to imitate precisely what Salisbury did, but rather that they took Salisbury and its books as a general model. For example, it seems that the location from which the Epistle was sung varied considerably. In the nineteenth century, with the development of a more rubricist tradition, liturgists seem to have transferred the same mindset to the Sarum Rite. This led them to view minor local variations as if they were entirely different rites, and thus they attributed rites to dioceses such as Lincoln and Bangor, which were simply applying the Sarum Rite in accordance with their own customs. In fact, only York and Hereford appear to have differed to any significant degree, and only Hereford, with its much more Roman form, could be considered substantially distinct.

What did a Mass in the Sarum Rite look like?

As in most of France, a Sarum Rite church had a long chancel with a small sanctuary where the altar stood at the east end, surrounded by curtains on the north and south sides, and sometimes on the east side as well. During the Canon, the minister would draw the curtains on the north and south sides. Generally, there were only two candles on the altar itself, although there were usually others around the altar. Hanging above the altar was the pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament. By the 16th century, parish churches (contrary to popular belief) usually had pews for the laity, and the nave was separated from the chancel by a barrier or screen – solid in larger churches and abbeys, and openwork in

parish churches in such a way as to form a frame, making the action at the high altar visible. This barrier or gallery was decorated at the bottom with images of saints and crowned by a large crucifix, accompanied by depictions of the Blessed Virgin and St John.

The ceremonies

The concept of 'noble simplicity' would have been incomprehensible to the medieval mind, and in particular to an English medieval mind. In everything—not merely in the religious sphere, but also in food and architecture—richness, complexity and elaboration were regarded as a good in themselves. Like other rites of the same period, the Sarum Rite aspired to splendour. I am sometimes asked what a Solemn Mass in the Sarum Rite was like, and I usually reply something along the lines of: 'Compared to a Solemn Mass according to the 1962 Missal, it would make the latter seem like an Evangelical service.' The Mass on a Sunday or a major feast day involved a grand procession through the entire church, taking in every side altar. Three or more processional crosses, banners, two or more thuribles, cantors in copes, and more besides. The music of the Sarum liturgy was also sumptuous: in the sixteenth century, whilst music on the continent was becoming more restrained, English polyphony was becoming increasingly elaborate, and the boys sang long and extraordinary melismas, rising ever higher in pitch. It is worth listening to the music of *the Eton Choirbook*, for example, of which there are several recordings, to understand the mindset of those days.

Outwardly, the appearance of the sacred ministers of the Sarum Rite resembled that of most Roman Rites during the Middle Ages. The vestments were practically the same throughout Europe: the shape of the chasuble towards the end of the fifteenth century was similar across the whole of northern Europe. Although several pre-Reformation chasubles have survived to the present day, as far as I am aware, there is only one example that still retains its original shape. You can see that it is blue. There was no particular colour sequence in the Sarum Rite (although a Victorian named Percy Dearmer attempted to create one), and blue was very common, produced using a very common British plant-based pigment called woad. This particular example bears the coat of arms of Whalley Abbey on the back (its last abbot was murdered by Henry VIII) and the Roman liturgical colours have been added to the hem, which means it was used during the years of persecution. I have a modern copy and can assure you that it is very comfortable to wear, much more so than any other style. It is full-length at the back and narrower at the front. It has a matching stole and maniple, both very long and narrow. The Sarum Rite did not use a chalice veil but rather a wide corporal, or a pair of corporals, which were placed over the chalice from behind; these corporals were kept in a 'corporal bag' which did not necessarily match the fabric of the vestments.

The vestments of the deacon and subdeacon were as one might expect; on major feast days, the acolyte was regarded as a sacred minister and was vested as such, in a tunic. And during the Canon, the paten was handed to him (and not to the subdeacon); it was placed on a silk scarf (in other words, not like our modern humeral veil), which hung over the left shoulder of the

acolyte. As in many other medieval rites, the bishop, particularly on Holy Thursday, was assisted by seven deacons and seven subdeacons.

Singers known as the 'choir directors'—two, three or four depending on the solemnity—wearing silk capes, usually carried staffs.

The Ordinary of the Mass

The Solemn Mass on a Sunday or a major feast day normally began, as I have already mentioned, with a grand procession. There was an *Asperges* – the clergy approached the celebrant at the sanctuary steps to be sprinkled – and then the entire church was processed through and sprinkled, and the side altars were incensed. In the high choir, a pause was observed for special prayers. In parish churches, these prayers were read in English and were known as 'bidding prayers' or 'Bidding of the Bedes' (prayers of the faithful). They were a curious combination of formality and informality; prayers were offered for all walks of life, the living and the dead; in a way, reading the surviving examples of these prayers gives us a sort of snapshot of what a community of that era considered important. After this, the celebrant would vest for Mass, usually at the altar.

The celebrant vestes; the prayers at the foot of the altar

The Sarum Rite provides a set of prayers different from those of the Roman Rite, and also prescribes the recitation of *the 'Veni Creator*', which has a slightly different form. The prayer *'Deus cui omne cor patet'* is then recited as a collect concluding the *'Veni Creator*'. It is likely that this was the first audible prayer of the Mass celebrated according to the Sarum Rite. This was followed by Psalm 42, then a silent *'Pater Noster'* and the *'Ave Maria'*, and a much shorter form of *the 'Confiteor*': the *'Misereatur'* differs slightly from the Roman form, and, interestingly, the *'Indulgentiam'* is more or less the same as that still used in the solemn papal blessing:

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant you absolution and remission of all your sins, a time of true penance and a change of life, and the grace and consolation of the Holy Spirit.

The celebrant is instructed to kiss the deacon and the subdeacon before ascending to the altar with the familiar 'Aufer a nobis', to kiss the altar and to make the sign of the cross.

The deacon places incense in the thurible and incenses the altar. Here we see an important liturgical object in the Sarum Rite, the 'text' or Book of the Gospels. It is a richly illuminated book used for ceremonial purposes, of which several famous copies survive (the Book of Kells, the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Canterbury Gospels, for example), and which was venerated at various points during Mass. During Mass, whenever a member of the clergy was incensed, they were given the Book of the Gospels to kiss. During the Offertory, when each member of the choir is incensed, this can take quite some time!

Mass of the Catechumens

Next, the sacred ministers recite the *Officium* or Introit, followed by the Kyrie (which the choir usually sings in a trope and is almost always plainchant rather than polyphonic), the Gloria and the Collects – generally seven in number. The hand gestures during the *'Dominus vobiscum'* and the chant differ from the Roman custom.

The subdeacon sings the Epistle in a melody identical to that of the modern Roman Gradual, from a position that appears to vary from church to church. Some have suggested that the use of the word *pulpitum*, which is also used for the tribune or rood screen, indicates that the subdeacon (and the deacon at the Gospel) sang from atop the rood screen itself. This may well have been the case in Salisbury itself, but the tribune was demolished in the 18th century, so it is now impossible to know for certain. I have been told that some French rites practised this, but in many English churches, singing from the tribune must have been unlikely, in my opinion, given the small doors used to access the top of the rood screen. It probably simply refers to a pulpit, lectern or raised platform, and in some cases we know this to be the case. Whilst the Gradual was being sung (from the steps of the chancel, as the name suggests, by the clergyman who, generally speaking, wore a silk cope), water and wine were placed in the chalice for Mass and taken to the celebrant at the *sedilia* for him to bless them.

There is no evidence that the celebrant recited either the Epistle or the Gospel; instead, he and the sacred ministers are instructed to recite the antiphons together.

Mass of the Faithful

At the Offertory, as in the traditional Dominican rite, the host and the chalice are offered together, with a prayer similar to the 'Suscipe *Sancta Trinitas*'. The offerings, the altar, the celebrant and the clergy are incensed, and the clergy are given the Gospel book to kiss.

The 'Orate fratres' is interesting:

> *Orate Fratres et sorores pro me, ut meum pariterque vestrum acceptum sit Domino Deo nostro sacrificium.*
>
> The response is:
>
> *May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten your heart and your lips: and may the Lord worthily accept this sacrifice of praise from your hands for our sins and offences.*

The Preface and the Canon are the same as in the Roman Missal of 1570, although the king is commemorated after the bishop, as was still the practice in the Roman Rite Mass in England in the nineteenth century. In the Canon, the gestures and rubrics differ from those of the Roman Rite.

Further differences appear before Communion. The bishop gives a solemn blessing after the *Pater Noster* (which is logical, given that this is where the nuptial blessing takes place, a blessing still conferred in the modern Roman Rite, in both the extraordinary and ordinary forms), and the prayers before Communion are different. I find them particularly beautiful in the Sarum Rite.

The reception of Communion was very rare, I believe, and there was a general Communion only at Easter following a period of preparation and general confession. After receiving the Sacred Host, the acolyte presented a chalice of unconsecrated wine for the purification of the mouth. This wine continued to be presented until the 17th century in England, even though by then the Mass was already that of the Roman Missal.

Although the Missal makes no mention of it, a blessing was sometimes given at the end of Mass, probably on the most important feast days. In York, this was done with the chalice and the corporal folded. In parish churches, blessed bread was distributed on Sundays, such as the *pain bénit* in France or the *antidoron* of Byzantium.

Subsequent history

Although the vicissitudes of the Reformation brought with them a decline in the Sarum Rite, it never truly faded from the minds of the English people. The decline occurred for several reasons – apart from the obvious one, namely the Protestant Reformation itself. The very small number of users meant that printing editions of the Missal and the other books would be impractical. Secondly, the seminaries in Rome, Valladolid, Lisbon and Douai adopted the Roman Rite, a change encouraged by the Jesuits, who were largely responsible for the training. But the Sarum Rite did not fall into oblivion. I have seen an 18th-century **Missale Romanum** intended for use in England in which all the proper texts for the English saints had been taken directly from the Sarum Rite. I have mentioned the survival of the monarch's name in the Canon and the wine administered after Communion. In the nineteenth century there was a resurgence of interest initiated by a great liturgist, Canon Daniel Rock, who is said to have celebrated the Sarum liturgy in the chapel of the Duke of Shrewsbury. It is often claimed, although written evidence has yet to be found, that when the English hierarchy was restored in 1850, it considered adopting the Sarum Rite but deemed it impracticable. A little later, the Anglo-Catholic movement within the Church of England substantially rediscovered the Sarum Rite. A great deal of scholarly work was undertaken to produce high-quality editions of the liturgical books. Dickinson's edition from the 1890s, now available online, is an excellent critical edition of the printed missals, and it is his unsurpassed work that I have followed in my own edition. Frere did the same with the manuscript missals; many other scholars, mostly members of the Anglican clergy, researched details and published their findings in journals that were popular in their day but are now very difficult to obtain, except at Oxford's Pusey Library. Perhaps more importantly, thanks to the inspiration of the exceedingly imaginative Percy Dearmer, Anglican churches throughout the twentieth century generally resembled, to a greater or lesser extent, churches of the Sarum Rite, until the new liturgical fashions of our time began to prevail. Now, sadly, it is easier to find the 'Muddled Church' than the Sarum Church. The last few decades have seen very few Catholic celebrations of the Sarum Mass; in 1996 and 1997, I myself celebrated twice at very well-attended Masses in the chapel of Merton College, Oxford. The second celebration, on Candlemas (the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, 2 February), is available on YouTube. These celebrations had the full approval of the Archbishop of Birmingham. A few years later, the then Bishop

Mario Conti of Aberdeen celebrated a Sarum Mass in Aberdeen – an interesting idea, given that Aberdeen was one of the places where the Sarum Mass was not celebrated in medieval times, as the diocese had its own Missal. There have been several Anglican celebrations and even one or two featuring actors in the roles of the sacred ministers. It can therefore be said that, although the Sarum liturgy is a rarity, it never completely disappeared from the consciousness of English Christendom; in fact, it is currently enjoying something of a revival, not only in the British Isles, but also in North America and Australia, amongst those who feel a cultural connection to Great Britain and, consequently, to its original liturgy. Just a couple of weeks ago, Catholics in Philadelphia celebrated First Vespers of the Purification of the Virgin, whilst Anglicans celebrated a Eucharist on the same day in Toronto. Dr William Renwick is working tirelessly in California to upload the texts of the Sarum Rite onto the internet.

Conclusion

Am I, then, proposing a complete restoration of the Sarum liturgy, so that it becomes the standard liturgy of the British Isles and their cultural sphere? That would be very good, but rather impractical. I believe, however, that it ought to be celebrated more often and, indeed, be better known, as should many other local liturgies. The first half of the twentieth century saw the revival of many forms of religious orders; this demonstrates that it is certainly possible to revive local rites of the Roman family as well. In particular, such a revival could enrich our understanding of the Roman Rite and provide us with a secure foundation for any genuinely organic development deemed necessary. The Sarum Rite is but one example; there are many others, and I hope that future CIEL conferences may address them.