

The Sarum Rite (Or, 'The Use of Salisbury')

Written by K B Napier

Monday, 23 March 2015 11:23

I find it incredible that many Anglicans think their 'church' is independent of Rome, when every part shrieks out "Roman Catholic sect"! One example of this Romanism is 'The Sarum Rite', or to give it its proper title, the 'Use of Salisbury' (Cathedral). The word 'use' in today's language, means 'variant'.

This rite provides instruction for the ordering of worship in the Cathedral, and it is a modified form of the Roman Rite, which is the Latin liturgical rite used by Rome, and usually found in the Gregorian chant. The Sarum variety was established in the Cathedral in the 11th century, by bishop Osmund, and instructed in the Mass and the 'divine office' (official prayers recited by clergy, including psalms, hymns and readings).

The divine office, or 'Liturgy of the hours' is an obligation upon the clergy of Salisbury, but quickly became the normal liturgy in most of Britain, until the reign of Queen Mary. The Rite was finished by the early part of the 17th century, but readers should note that its pattern is found in the Anglican liturgy and the Book of Common Prayer (which is why the Book was not received well by Protestant ministers). Therefore, it is a twist of words to say that Anglicanism is free from Rome. Every so often a number of clergy and others try to reinstate the Rite, but its use is not universal or gathering great numbers.

Anglo-Saxon Origin

As was common, Osmund was appointed by William of Normandy as bishop of Salisbury; he was not a cleric but a Norman nobleman. (We see this idea of 'the church' being an alternative form of employment for many people, rather than a calling). He revised existing Celtic-Anglo-Saxon rites as well as the Roman Rite, and created the Sarum Rite. It seems that its pattern was based on one used in Rouen, France:

"This conjecture approaches certainty when it is found that the Use of Rouen and that of Sarum were almost identical in the 11th century. A curious and interesting illustration of this will be found in an extract of a Rouen manuscript missal, assumed to be 650 years old... The Rouen Pontifical, of about 1007 A.D., quoted in the same work, shows a like affinity of that of Sarum and Exeter in later days." (A.H. Pearson (1884). Sarum missal in English)

These revisions were used as the basis for a new Missal ('how to' perform Mass), Breviary (prayers, hymns and psalms, readings), and other liturgical manuals. Becoming widespread,

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many local churches amended the Sarum Rite to include their own particular prayers and ceremonies. Others changed the Rite to such an extent that they are liturgical manuals of their own. Scholars say that the Sarum Rite even extended as far as Norway and Portugal.

When the Church of England broke away (at least in notion) from Rome in the 1530s, it retained the Sarum Rite, and only gradually amended it. The reign of Edward the Sixth saw the Rite abandoned in favour of the Book of Common Prayer. But, Queen Mary reinstated the Rite in 1553; later, it was then banned by Elizabeth 1st in 1559. But, Catholics continued its use, often secretly. Even this was replaced by the Roman Tridentine form.

The Sarum Rite was re-introduced by the late 19th century Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement (the one that spawned Cardinal Newman) that seriously 'mixed' Roman and Anglican churchdom. They resorted to the rite because of its underlying 'English' nature, but it was still Roman Catholic. Its advocates went back to Romish traditions and ornaments, as used in the original Sarum Rite, to emphasise their allegiance to Rome and to ignore Protestant influences.

An English parson, Percy Dearmer, enthusiastically brought the Sarum Rite into being in his own church, and wrote about it in 'The Parson's Handbook'. And thus the Rite is still used in various Anglican churches and monasteries., under the title "English Use" or "prayer Book Catholicism". It has even been used in some Catholic churches, and in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia.

As one comes to expect from Rome, the Sarum Rite is elaborate and ritualistic, and includes the blasphemous Mass. Before this there is a procession around all the church's altars, using incense, until the great rood screen is reached. After much singing, prayers, etc., vestments are changed for the Mass. There is a great deal more ritual during the Rite.

It is possible, then, that if you visit Cathedrals and witness a service, and sit respectfully to watch and listen, that what you are paying respect to is not scriptural truth, but the Sarum Rite, which is Romanistic through and through.

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