

FATHER ADRIAN FORTESCUE, one of the world's greatest linguists, was also an organist. Between 1899 and 1905 Fortescue passed doctoral examinations in **moral theology, dogma, ecclesiastical history, canon law, Arabic, and biblical science**—passing the examination in Semitic languages with great distinction, a rare achievement. On 10 June 1905 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity, making him the very rare recipient of a triple doctorate. The level of his scholarship was so exceptional that he was awarded a prize presented to him personally by the Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria.

Father Fortescue explains the meaning of “Ite, Missa Est” below:

last prayer in other liturgies.¹ The mediæval writers know this form.² Meanwhile the first prayer (Postcommunion) absorbed the ideas of the second, lost its special note of thanksgiving to some extent and became almost a general prayer about the feast or occasion, though it nearly always keeps some allusion to the Communion. Its name varied in the middle ages. “Oratio ad complendum” was common;³ Durandus, who calls the Communion antiphon “Postcommunio,” calls this “Oratio novissima quæ proprie postcommunio vocatur.”⁴ This name then became the regular one. In the early middle ages the celebrant did not turn to the people at the *Dominus vobiscum* before the Postcommunion,⁵ later he did.⁶ The number, arrangement, style and rhythm of Postcommunions correspond exactly to what we have said of the collects (pp. 248-251).

§ 2. Dismissal.

The end of all liturgies (except that of the Nestorians) is a formal dismissal of the people by the deacon. The form in *Apost. Const.* VIII, xv, 10 is: “Go in peace.”⁷ Antioch, Alexandria and the Byzantine rite have: “Let us go (or: go) in peace. R. In the name of the Lord,” then a short prayer of dismissal by the celebrant.⁸ The Nestorians have only this prayer and a blessing.⁹ The Gallican rites had similar forms; *Stowe Missal*: “Missa acta est. R. In pace,” etc.¹⁰ As far back as we can trace the

¹ *Ap. Const.* VIII, xv, 6: “Bow to God through his Christ and bless him” (Brightman, 26) cfr. Antioch: “Let us bow our heads to the Lord” (*ib.* 66), Alexandria (*ib.* 142) etc.

² Durandus: *Rat.* vi, 23, § 7, etc.

³ *Ordo Rom.* I, 21 (P.L. lxxviii, 948) etc.

⁴ *Rat.* iv, 57, § 1. ⁵ *Ordo Rom.* I (*loc. cit.*).

⁶ Durandus, *loc. cit.* ⁷ Brightman, p. 27.

⁸ *Ib.* 67, 142, 397. ⁹ *Ib.* 303.

¹⁰ Duchesne: *Origines*, p. 217.—P.L. lxxxv, 120 (Mozarabic).

Roman dismissal has been: “Ite missa est. R. Deo gratias”.¹ The form has caused much needless embarrassment. It is simply the archaic use of “missa,” meaning “missio,” “dimissio”² and the right translation is: “Go, it is the dismissal”. Florus of Lyons in the IXth century explains it quite correctly.³

Since about the XIth century, on days that have the character of penance, instead of the dismissal we say: “Benedicamus Domino”.⁴ The reason is that on such days the people did not go away, but stayed in church for further prayers, the longer prayers suitable for fast-days or, maybe, Vespers.⁵ So at one time “Benedicamus Domino” was sung at the end of the Christmas midnight Mass, because people stayed for Lauds.⁶ Then “Ite missa est” began to be looked upon as a joyful form, following the Gloria. So at Requiems they left it out and substituted: “Requiescant in pace”. John Beleth (XIIth cent.) says this is still “only a general custom”.⁷

§ 3. After the Dismissal.

It must surprise a stranger that, after we have solemnly told the people to go away, they stay and the service continues. The explanation is, of course, that the three elements after “Ite missa est,” the Placeat prayer, blessing and last gospel, are all late additions, originally private devotions which have found their way into the official text, just as have the cele-

¹ *Ordo Rom.* I, 21 (P.L. lxxviii, 948); II, 15 (*ib.* 976); III, 18 (*ib.* 984).

² See p. 399.

³ *de actione missæ*, n. 92 (P.L. cix, 72). See below p. 400.

⁴ It was not so in the time of *Ordo Rom.* I, 24 (P.L. lxxviii, 949); but Micrologus notes it (34 and 46; P.L. cli, 1005, 1011), cfr. Durandus: *Rat.* iv, 57, § 7).

⁵ Bona: *Rev. liturg.* II, xx, n. 3.

⁶ Durandus: *loc. cit.*

⁷ *Rat. div. offic.* 49. (P.L. ccii, 56).

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