

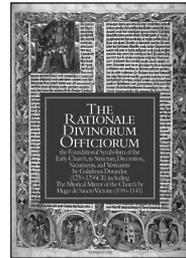
# The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum: The Foundational Symbolism of the Early Church, its Structure, Decoration, Sacraments, and Vestments

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“The parables of knowledge are in the treasures  
of wisdom” (*Ecclesiasticus 1:25*)



**T**he world has seemingly been turned on its head—for we live in a time of great parody and confusion with conflicting and deceptive voices as alluded to by Biblical passages that tell of “[men] speaking perverse things” (*Acts 20:30*), “vain talkers and seducers” (*Titus 1:10*), “erring and driving into error” (*2 Timothy 3:13*), all trademarks of modernism. In 1907, Pope Pius X (1835-1914) astutely diagnosed modernism as “the synthesis of all heresies.”<sup>1</sup> The French metaphysician, René Guénon (1886-1951), exposed what he termed the “modern deviation” in an unparalleled fashion in 1927 in his work *The Crisis of the Modern World*:

[T]here can be nothing but antagonism between the religious spirit, in the true sense of the word, and the modern mentality, and any compromise is bound to weaken the former and favor the latter, whose hostility moreover will not be placated thereby, since it can only aim at the utter destruction of everything that reflects in mankind a reality higher than the human.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (September 8, 1907).

<sup>2</sup> René Guénon, “A Material Civilization,” in *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne, Marco Pallis and Richard C. Nicholson (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p.95.

Intellectual myopia is today a proliferating symptom due to the eclipse of the Sacred, and so how does the contemporary mind go about understanding a medieval liturgical treatise such as *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* at a time when the forces of a desacralized world appear to be gaining momentum?

To do so, one has to suspend, if not, unlearn all that one has allegedly learned about the Middle Ages. In this process, it will become apparent how profoundly biased the contemporary mind is regarding its history and how many misconceptions prevail in particular about the Middle Ages, portraying it in negative terms as a backward and dark age. In contrast, the post-medieval world is celebrated, with the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution and the European Enlightenment, being glorified as the forerunners of the modern and post-modern world. These events ushered in the secular outlook that dominates today, which is essentially non-Christian, even though the contemporary West continues to be mistakenly characterized as “Christian”. Rather than promoting coexistence and tolerance between religions, hard secularism is in effect an attack on all religions: “The modern West is said to be Christian, but this is untrue: the modern outlook is anti-Christian, because it is essentially anti-religious”.<sup>3</sup> Consider for a moment if what we thought we knew about the past, such as the Middle Ages, consisted more of half-truths and inaccurate conclusions, and if the past was actually something quite different from what we have imagined it to be.

If we can be receptive to this suggestion of open-mindedness, works like *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* will provide many insights about the nature of reality as it was known in the pre-modern world. This work is also important beyond the scope of the Western Church or the Roman Catholic Church, as it captures a world infused with the Sacred, which has analogous expressions across the diverse cultures of the pre-modern or traditional world.<sup>4</sup> Let us not forget that it was in the Middle Ages of the Christian West that the Latin term *philosophia perennis* or perennial philosophy was likely coined by Agostino Steuco (1497-1548). The Middle Ages produced mystics of the highest caliber such as Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), and many saints such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Francis of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> See Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006).

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