

FROM COUNCIL TO PARISH

By John B. Mannion

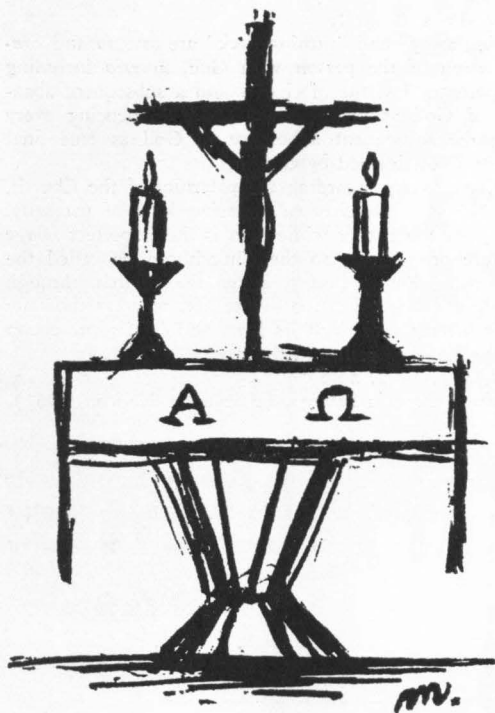
(As told to Aquinas Farren, O.P.)

In view of all the discussion and writing about liturgy and the Council, just what do you expect the Second Vatican Council to enact? How many proposals are reasonable and how many are wild hopes?

Whatever speculations or predictions anyone makes about results from the Second Vatican Council must be based on the common proposals of scholars and experts. These results should be considered merely as the next

steps in the liturgical reform which was begun by Pope St. Pius X and is still progressing. When we speculate about results from the Council we should restrict ourselves to a consideration of the principles which are at issue, and not so much with the minutia; not that we should exclude the fine points, but we have no way of knowing just what particular details will be legislated. Consequently we should keep this in mind when we listen to the commentators.

Certainly one of the first principles



of liturgical reform which should be re-emphasized and applied to today's liturgy is that demanding clarity of rite. "Clarity of rite" is aimed at making the liturgy more immediately meaningful.

Starting with the central point of Christian life, the Mass, what type of change should we expect?

There are many areas where this principle could receive a profitable application for us in the twentieth century, the chief of which is the Mass itself. There are several parts of the Holy Sacrifice, already the objects of considerable scholarly study and criticism, which the Council might well clarify.

Starting with the beginning of Mass, the entry of the priest into the sanctuary might become more meaningful if the proper idea of a procession were presented intelligently to our people. Throughout the course of the Mass, there are four places where processions have a place, yet only a vestige of these is still with us in the form of the singing which is prescribed for the introit, gradual, offertory, and communion. Originally, all these were processions of the priest and/or people taking part in the Sacrifice. This active sharing and offering is no longer apparent to our people under the present form. One helpful solution to this problem is the introduction into the Mass of popular hymns sung by the people. At least this would emphasize their active role. The offertory rite, for instance, can be modified to allow everyone to take part and actually present his gifts, at least through representatives of the congregation.

Another element in great need of revision is the epistle and gospel in their present form. These readings are a proclamation by the Church of the revealed Word of God to His people duly assembled. Mass is one of the times the Church reads the Scriptures to her sons; therefore, it should be done intelligently. A looked-for answer to this problem is to have the readings made in the vernacular language by a deacon, subdeacon, ordained lector, or a layman deputed for the office. This reading should be done away from the altar, facing the people, to indicate its character as a public reading of the Bible, and to distinguish it as separate from the Sacrifice. In this form, the celebrant could sit at the side and listen to the readings with the rest of the congregation.

The offertory as we have it now could be changed considerably to increase the awareness of the people that they are offering not only gifts, but most importantly, themselves. In earlier days, there used to be a litaney at this part of the Mass, and all the intentions of the group were listed to be

prayed for (the present *Oremus* which precedes the offertory prayer is a relic of this litany). Much of the offertory rite itself might be changed. Later additions might be eliminated such as some of the prayers which stress sacrifice even before the consecration of the bread and wine. These prayers are almost out of place in reference to the parts of Mass which follow. There is danger in viewing the offertory as a separate function and neglecting its proper relation to the whole Sacrifice: the offertory is a preparation for the main action which is the canon of the Mass.

The preface is also an element which could stand some alterations or at least additions. A greater latitude of proper prefaces could be provided, thus enabling the people to be more conscious of the particular "mysteries," moods, or teaching celebrated by the Church as the liturgical year unfolds.

There are many improvements which could be expected with regard to the canon of the Mass. One is the list of saints which is included in different sections. The saints named are all patrons of Rome and for the most part are unknown to most Americans. These lists might be changed to include local saints in different parts of the world, or to include diocesan, city and other patrons, or even universally known and venerated saints of both ancient and modern times. One other element would profitably affect the people's understanding: the celebrant facing the people during the canon. This would stress the unity, the community, the family nature of the celebration of the Eucharistic meal.

In general, the structure of the Mass could be clarified by omitting some of the repetitive offertory prayers and the three prayers said by the priest just before communion. These could either be entirely eliminated or their inclusion left to the option of the priest.

The communion of the people brings us back to considering processions. While the people receive communion, they could be made more conscious of their unity in this corporate action by singing hymns in their own language. There is already provision and even recommendation for this; all we need to do now is begin singing. Similarly, with regard to the gradual and offertory, hymns could be sung by the people, and if the length of the texts used in the Mass were insufficient, these texts could be supplemented by additional verses from the psalms.

This whole consideration of the singing called for at the four processions, and especially recommending popular vernacular hymns presents us with the problem of Church music. Should we retain or jettison plain chant?

○ We can come back to this flaming question in a moment, after we

finish with the Mass. Another aspect of the Mass that might well be changed is the dismissal rite. This could be simplified merely by dropping the last gospel entirely, and perhaps the "Placeat." The abbreviated form would give a greater stress and clarity to the dismissal. All of these suggestions will contribute to clarifying the symbolism of the various elements and signs used in the Mass. This will in turn bring us to a more intelligent commitment of our attention and our whole being as we progress through an ever clearer and more meaningful rite.

One final reform in relation to the Mass that the Council might institute is the selection of the scriptural readings. Our present system uses a cycle which is completed every year. Many important passages in the scriptures never come to our attention according to this scheme of readings. To remedy this, the number of readings in the Mass could be increased from the two we now have (lesson and gospel) to three. A second step would be the introduction of a cycle of scriptural readings which would be completed only every two or three years. The increased number of readings coupled with a greater variety of selections, particularly from the Old Testament, would increase our knowledge of the scriptures, of God's own plan given to us. This would be a major accomplishment, since we love best what we know best. Again we have a vestige of something similar from earlier days in the Church: the extra readings on the Ember Days. Also, we would not necessarily have to have extra readings every day; even if we had them only on Sundays and major feast days, we would benefit.

Now to go back to the question of church music. The fact is incontestable that vast numbers of our people neither know nor appreciate Gregorian chant, and what is more, they show no inclination to learning it. (The same can be said for Latin.) Yet the qualities of the chant are unique and to be treasured. Perhaps some simple manner of singing could be worked out, something not alien to our times, yet reminiscent of the chant. Perhaps one solution for this problem is indicated to us by our Anglican brothers who have retained many of the traditional plain chant melodies and fitted English words into them. This seems to be successful for them. Could it be so for us too?

Are there any other general needs which you think the Council will stress?

A second principle which should receive considerable attention by the Fathers of the Council also concerns the intelligibility of our liturgy, and this brings us to the highly volatile issue of using vernacular in the liturgy.

I expect that at least the parts which are read aloud to the people, which are read on their behalf, or which they themselves recite—such as the scripture readings, the collects, *Gloria, Credo, Pater Noster*, etc.—will be in their own native tongue. The silent prayers of the Mass, such as the canon, and all the familiar versicles such as the *Dominus Vobiscum* and the *Kyrie* could be left in their original languages. As long as they are well known, or said silently, the language makes little difference. If the canon should come to be read aloud as it formerly was (and I believe it will again be, but probably not as a result of this Council), then I think there is an argument for putting this into the local languages also.

There are many arguments for advocating the use of local languages. Primary is the intelligent worship which should follow from a meaningful rite. Liturgy is a complex of sacred signs and acts through which God is worshipped and man sanctified. One of the chief signs is the spoken word. Words in Latin signify little or nothing to today's people. A sign, however, which signifies nothing is no longer a sign. Secondly, since there is so little understanding of Latin, it is unreasonable to ask people to offer the greatest act of their lives in a language unintelligible to them. And since the scriptures are to be read and explained to the people at Mass, it stands to reason that the official proclamation of the Word of God intended for the benefit of His people should be in a language they can understand.

One argument in favor of retaining Latin foresees the removal of difficulties by educating the people to participate in Latin dialogue Masses. But even the Latin dialogue Mass is not effecting all the expected results. In many churches the degree of participation and enthusiasm is dwindling; there is no great increase of meaning in spite of heroic efforts. My own parish had dialogue Masses. A few months ago my wife was leaving Mass behind two other women, one of whom was obviously a visitor. The visitor said to the parishioner, "My, isn't all this participation in the Mass wonderful! You people get so much more out of the Mass than we do at home." "Yes," replied the parishioner, "everyone does—except me." Here is a perfect example of a woman who does not understand anything more about the Mass than she did before community dialogue was introduced. But she thinks everyone else does. Well, the explanation is quite simple: the others weren't getting any more from dialogue Mass than she was. The difference is that she recognizes and admits this. Recently the participation became so poor that it was decided to drop it. (Needless to say, this is not a decision I would recommend.) Until the Mass and other rites of the lit-

urgy are celebrated in a language understood by the people, these unfortunate circumstances will be with us.

My insistence and pleading for the use of local languages is not just a whim or a desire to see change for the sake of change. Some years ago, I was a "Latinist" and wanted to retain the beauty and richness of the Latin language. But experience in dealing with people has convinced me that the use of the vernacular is a necessity for effecting intelligent participation. People just can't worship and pray in a foreign tongue. And after all, which is more important: the preservation of a discipline introduced centuries ago (because Greek was no longer understood), or the full, living communication of men with their Creator and Redeemer? Besides, I am only advocating vernacular for pastoral or parochial use. The religious Orders would, I hope, continue the Latin tradition, especially in monasteries. Also, at world cross-roads and places having large numbers of foreigners travelling or residing, Mass could be offered in Latin, thus overcoming national or linguistic difficulties.

This problem has been discussed at such great length, and with such vehemence and passion that the real issues are not always grasped. Of course, the resolution of the problem lies in the hands of the Fathers of the Council in union with the Pope, in whom is the authority to determine such practices. However, it seems to me that if this one change is made by the Second Vatican Council, it will be a step of inestimable value in bringing our people to a more meaningful sharing in the liturgy.

The third principle which I expect Vatican II to consider is that of local adaptation. Allowing bishops of an area to prescribe certain rites, ceremonies or formulas of public worship is a progressive move to more intelligent worship. The bishop, with papal approval of course, could adapt universal signs now in use, but with little meaning for his people, to more significant forms. This adaptation could apply to music, ceremonies, saints invoked, and many other things. Music gives us an example of the need. If we in the United States whose culture is founded on western European culture have such difficulty with chant, how much more will Asians or Africans? Anyone who has heard the *Missa Luba* of the Africans will readily appreciate this point. Another minor instance needing local change and legislation is that of liturgical colors. For those of western European culture, there is no difficulty. However, for a large part of Asians, white, our color of joy, is the color of mourning and grief. How meaningful to them is the color of the vestments at Christmas and Easter? In India, it is customary to remove one's shoes when he enters a home or other sacred

place. But the priest must wear shoes at Mass. Chinese expect a head-dress or hat of some kind to be part of ceremonial vestments; the priest must keep his head uncovered during Mass. These instances could be multiplied. More to the point for us in this country is the greater use we could make of the permission for evening Masses. We might liturgically recognize our national day of Thanksgiving. We could have appropriate rituals for solemnizing wedding engagements and anniversaries, wakes, vigils and special celebrations; here again, the possibilities are practically endless.

Turning our discussion to the Office, there are many possibilities for action according to our three principles of directness and clarity, local language and local adaptation. The aim of revision should be to make the Office once again a more personal act of prayer by those who recite it. Then a simplified form could be made available for public use. As the breviary is now, it is so complex and cumbersome that only the most zealous laypeople bother with it at all. Most people know nothing about it. We shouldn't have to manufacture devotions for our people, especially since we have official prayers of the Church already at hand for their use. This simply means adapting the Office, simplifying its content and structure especially by shortening it, and offering it to the people in their vernacular tongues. Perhaps an Office with only morning and evening prayer would be enough. Such a use of the Office would be advantageous on three levels: parish, personal and family. The parish could celebrate the Office on Sundays, on special feastdays, or the evening before them, thus bringing home the themes of the Church year in a striking way to its members. The individual would benefit from his participation in such prayer, and he could pray his Office privately every day at his own convenience. The units composing the parish, that is, the families, would also benefit from praying the official prayer of the Church. In this country, we already have the example of whole congregations of Sisters' communities who have changed their legislation on the prayers to be said by their members. The direction of these changes has been from recitation of individual prayers, litanies, etc., to the recitation of one of the many Offices provided now by the Church with official approbation. These religious families are recognizing the value and efficacy of family prayer according to officially approved Offices.

Well, what about other areas of liturgical life, such as the sacraments or the calendar?

When we look at the sacramental life of the Church, we can see another area for improvement in our present uses. I expect an application of

these three principles to the sacraments also. The Mass is so encumbered with additions which are unmeaningful to us that we almost have to consciously ask ourselves all the way through, "What should my reaction be now?" If the symbolism of the Mass were more direct and in touch with our present state of culture and education, we would be able to react more intelligently from our deeper understanding of what is taking place in front of our eyes. This need to cut down on non-essential rites and to make the signs more meaningful has been reflected by the revisions of the Roman *Pontificale* and, to a lesser extent, in the new edition of the Roman Missal.

Our Church calendar will undoubtedly receive more attention of the type which removed St. Philomena. There are a number of "saints" whose existence can't be verified. Local adaptation could have a prominent place here, especially in celebrating feasts of local patrons, the more modern saints of a country, and even the national or local holidays. The present trend to emphasize the temporal cycle of the Church can be continued until the liturgical seasons finally mean something to the average Catholic again. Even now with all the talk about the temporal cycle, what does "the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost" mean to an individual at Mass on Sunday morning? People just have no notion of following along with this cycle of the Church; it needs great stress and explanation.

On the whole, then, I expect the Second Vatican Council to act decisively and positively with regard to these three principles of liturgy. Not that I expect the Fathers of the Council to actually legislate all these changes, but I do expect them to direct the Sacred Congregation of Rites to effect all the desired changes. The Council will specify the general lines of change, and the Congregation can legislate the particular matters.

Most of the proposals we have just discussed have been submitted to the Preparatory Commissions of the Council. Their actual proposal and discussion in the assembled Council can only be done by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He it is Who will direct the lines of the worship which He wishes us to offer. He it is Who will direct the discussion of the Second Vatican Council.

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