



Wells

FROM THE EDITORS “Success” Of The Liturgical Reform

The December 1981 issue of *Notitiae* published the results of a survey conducted by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship in the summer of 1981, inquiring into the use of the Latin language in Masses celebrated throughout the world, as well as the demand for Latin on the part of the laity and demand for the so-called Tridentine rite. Without giving all the details of the survey, it might be said simply that Latin is not used in most dioceses. Where it is in use, it is an infinitesimal minimum. But this comes as no surprise to anyone who has been aware of the developments of the past fifteen years.

Nor does the exclamation of glee on the part of the liturgical vernacularists cause surprise. They have achieved what they set out to do, and now their efforts have been officially catalogued by a Roman congregation itself. Reverend John Gurrieri, who is director of the American bishops' committee on the liturgy, said that the survey “demonstrates the success of liturgical reform.”

The problem that always remains, however, is that the Second Vatican Council, in whose name all the liturgical reforms have been introduced, demanded the use of Latin in the liturgy. Without repeating here all the references in the council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, two stand out: “the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites” (para. 36); “steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them” (para. 54).

Truly, rather than saying that the survey shows the “success of liturgical reform,” it quite obviously shows that the reform demanded by the council fathers has not been achieved, but instead it has been deliberately impeded. If the fathers ordered the use of Latin in speaking and singing by the people at Masses celebrated in Latin, then the

survey shows that the will of the fathers has been thwarted. By whom? Obviously by those who have taken credit for the demise of Latin and so gleefully proclaim the triumph of their own version of the place of the vernacular, which the fathers *permitted* in certain parts of the Mass at the same time that they *ordered* the use of Latin.

It has been the position of *Sacred Music* from the moment of the publication of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that the granting of the use of the vernacular languages in the liturgy is a great privilege and an historic concession given by the Second Vatican Council. But it has also been the unbending conviction of the editors of this journal that the decrees of the Second Vatican Council ordering the use of Latin, the fostering of Gregorian chant, the utilization of the vast treasury of polyphonic music composed to Latin texts, as well as the composition of new music to Latin texts, must be conscientiously obeyed.

The will of the council has simply been set aside by those who did not want what the fathers decreed. I well recall a Benedictine monk who said at a meeting in Kansas City that he would never accept the sixth chapter of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, because it was written by conservatives. Obviously it was not what he wanted that the fathers had ordered, so he would not take it. And the testimony of the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments and Divine Worship in its survey shows clearly the extent of the disobedience.

Moral theology deals with standards of conduct, some valid and some quite false. One of the false standards that is so widespread in our day, perhaps because we have so completely given ourselves to the democratic process, is that standard based on the will of the majority. Everyone is doing it! Parents of teen-agers hear that so often, and are pressed to oppose such false reasoning to allow doubtful conduct. But here we have the gleeful vernacularists proclaiming that their liturgical reform is successful because the survey has shown that "everybody is doing it!"

Latin is necessary for many reasons. It preserves the unity of the Church. It is that "noble language of Rome" as Pope John Paul II has called it. It is inseparably connected to Gregorian chant and fifteen hundred years of sacred music. It remains a bulwark against heresy that so easily finds its way into the modern tongues. It is the will of the Church that it be used. In the face of such reasons, why are there then some who so gleefully proclaim its demise in our time? The answer is not a happy one, but it is a clear one. There is an anti-Roman note in the entire effort to dispose of that "noble language of ancient Rome."

The will of the Church is clear. The council fathers' words are clear. The repeated statements of Pope Paul VI, even his pleading with the Benedictines to maintain the glory of their Latin monastic office, stand clear. The present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has spoken his will, as recently as his apostolic letter, *Dominicae cenae*, not to mention the example he himself sets as he moves about the world and when he celebrates in Saint Peter's Basilica, using the "ancient language of the Roman Church." Repeated orders to seminaries prescribing the study of Latin and the learning of Gregorian chant have been clearly promulgated. There is really no doubt. But the liturgical reformers do not want Latin or anything that goes with it. So, now, using a survey that shows that an overwhelming majority is not obeying the will of the Church, they have declared that their reform has been successful.

But Rome is eternal. Its way will ultimately prevail. The Church will preserve her noble language and its accompanying heritage of sacred music. The true reform of the Vatican Council will be achieved *in tempore acceptabili*.



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FROM THE EDITORS:	
"Success" of the Liturgical Reform	3
Now is the Time!	5
Liturgical Environment	5
THE WORKHOUSE	
<i>Monsignor Francis P. Schmitt</i>	7
THE FUNERAL LITURGY	
<i>Monsignor Richard J. Schuler</i>	11
LITURGY AND THE REALM OF THE RATIONAL	
<i>Bishop Rudolf Graber</i>	15
REVIEWS	18
NEWS	22
CONTRIBUTORS	23
LIST OF MEMBERS	25
EDITORIAL NOTES	24
INDEX OF VOLUME 108	28