



View of the city of Lerida with the Old Cathedral

SHOULD NOT THE OLD RITE BE RESTORED?

“Should not the old rite be restored?” We must listen to the Tridentinists when they put this question. “Even if,” they might continue, “it is only a minority — though it would be a considerable one at that — who found and would still find the ‘old Mass’ not only according to their taste but deeply fulfilling to their devotion, is it a kindness to them, is it charity to deprive them of this? Moreover, surely those who feel and know their deprivation had a right at least to be consulted, before the swinging changes were imposed on them. If they were being gravely misled by the old liturgy then of course they would have had to be weaned from it, but the word *wean* is to be stressed. Withdrawal, the deprivation of something intensely depended upon, is not an experience lightly to be inflicted on a patient; and the patient in this case had been fully supported in his addiction by his Church. Nowhere in any responsible quarter has the least suggestion been made that the celebration of the old liturgy was incompatible with complete orthodoxy and the most profound spirituality. To see how many, given the chance, would flock to the old Mass would be a salutary experience awaiting those pastors and masters who maintain that all is well with the new rite, and that only a few dissidents think otherwise. If those responsible had consulted the faithful in the first place, not to mention the ordinary run of the clergy, we should not now be witnessing the need for a major reversal of policy. The whole Church has been deprived on account of the defects of the new Mass with its privileged position.”

One must agree with much of this. Nor must we omit to mention what to Tridentinists is the most stinging injustice of all. The Mass they desire, which was until of late the Mass throughout the western Church, is now either pro-

scribed or else only obtainable by special permission. Whereas all too often no sanction is brought to bear on "trendies" who not only flout authority but who disfigure the Mass to the point of destroying it. Is it to be wondered at that illicit Mass centers where the old rite is celebrated should have sprung up as they have done?

However, the conclusion drawn, namely, that the faithful should have the same right of access to the old as to the new rite, and that these should in fact run parallel with one another, is one which does not necessarily follow. For what is presupposed is that in point of orthodoxy, sacrality, and for that matter Latin, the new rite is so deficient as to be irredeemable; while the old rite of course has nothing to learn from the new, so that among other things the solemn farce of the celebrant's reading the gospel at high Mass before the deacon sings it, is to be clung on to *mordicus*.

Certainly there would be good grounds for its continuance if only in the old rite, strictly interpreted, were to be found those qualities which its adherents understandably claim for it: orthodoxy, sacrality, Latin, and with Latin the historical musical tradition of the Church. But is this the case, and in so far as it may appear to be so, is it not rather on account of an interpretation of the new rite all too prevalent, but which does not do it justice?

It would be ironical if success in pleading for the rehabilitation of the Tridentine rite were to lead to the segregation of the Church's Latin tradition — and the sacral expressiveness going with it — from the main body of the faithful, and to its becoming the mark and property of virtually a sect. "Let them have their Mass" — then the rest of us can forget all about it, and if it doesn't die out in time it will certainly cease to be of the slightest significance.

But let us imagine that with the next turn of fortune's wheel the Tridentinists gain their point. On Sundays in nearly every parish church one Mass at least will be said or sung in the old rite. Or will it? Certainly this could be the case where a sufficient number of people desire it and where there are priests competent in the Tridentine procedure. Such priests for the most part will be those of riper years and they will not be getting any thicker on the ground. From whatever source, the supply of young priests practised in the old rite is unlikely to be more than a trickle. Is there then to be a pool of Tridentinist priests which can be drawn on for service in parishes otherwise bereft or who will function at specific centers? Are such priests to be exclusively devoted to the old rite and either incapable of celebrating in the new rite or else excused from doing so, and could such hot-house plants really be afforded? Priests, however, who celebrate now in one and now in the other rite find for the most part that it is only by a special effort that they can switch from one to the other: they would be likely to end up with something of a hybrid (which could be a good thing provided the proportions are right); but it is not likely that ordinands in the seminaries will for the most part wish or that they will be required to learn to say Mass in the old as well as in the new rite.

Then there is the question of the calendar, with its changes, particularly in the scripture readings. Are we seriously to entertain the possibility of two sets of congregations going to two sets of Masses with two different sets of readings and presumably two different sets of homilies for Sundays and feast-days? There is also the question of missals for the faithful. It would be expensive, to

say the least, to provide two different sets of these.

One doubts however if the majority of those who support the old rite are in fact strict Tridentinists. What they seek is quietness and devotion in a said Mass, even in one in the vernacular, and Gregorian and polyphony and ceremony in a solemn Mass. Of course they like the altar “the right way round.” Some might indeed be disappointed if in many if not most churches Mass in the old rite were to be celebrated “facing the people,” as according to the old rubrics it may be. They might well think it was the new rite or something so like it as to make no difference. Or if it was the new rite in Latin, said or sung, that was being celebrated at an altar in the old position, how many would notice the difference, or mind it if they did?

If the truth were known, most of these who love the old rite would want to see the tradition carried on fully and richly but not necessarily in every detail nor without such modifications as might reasonably be called for. Often they are unfamiliar with solemn or indeed “low” Latin Mass in the new rite; sometimes indeed they have been turned against it. If they were asked: Would you rather hive off *cum permissu* in order to use the old missal exclusively, or by coming to terms with the new missal be in a position to share with your fellow Catholics all in substance that you wish to preserve? Could we doubt what their answer would be?

To take up a scarcely recent suggestion as to how the new and old rites might ultimately converge, the statement might simply be issued: Mass celebrated whether in Latin or the vernacular and following the new scheme for the collects and readings shall be deemed to be Mass in the approved rite of the Church. For the sake of order in practice, however, there would have to be certain guidelines. The old procedure at the beginning of Mass — “the prayers at the foot of the altar” — could be added to the several choices already allowed in the new rite. The old offertory prayers in whole or in part could likewise be sanctioned as an alternative to the new (they would be said in silence anyway). Let the canon proceed with fewer or more kissings, crossings and genuflections with the new or old rubrics as the outer limits, but the new formula for the consecration must stand. And since celebrants cannot keep chopping and changing over details it would seem reasonable — where the *shape* of the liturgy is concerned — to retain the new rite as the authorized one from the consecration onwards. The priest in reciting the canon neither need nor should unduly raise his voice. For the rest really nothing apart from the triple *Domine non sum dignus* (which could easily be accepted as an alternative) has been lost, while something has been gained.

The Latinist cause is weakened by so heavy an emphasis in certain quarters on the old rite at the expense of the new. Apart from Radio 3 it is in fact in the new rite that our Latin musical heritage is being effectually preserved. The battle for this is a battle for much else.

We cannot however expect to remove the beam from the Tridentinist eye while a plank remains in our own. If Tridentinism has a poison vein, so undoubtedly has the reform: to wit, those who reduce the Mass to a common meal with however religious a tinge, or who place the community element in the center. A real canker has eaten into the liturgical movement, and until it has been excised there can be no settling of the Tridentinist question. We need a

reaffirmation of the Catholic doctrine of the Mass together with a specific rejection of ultra-communitarianism, and this we have lately received from Rome. A campaign of preaching and teaching now needs to be mounted. Moreover as soundness must be inculcated in doctrine and holiness in life, so must sacrality in the liturgy.

Meanwhile out-and-out rightists should consider that the claims to obedience to the pope and hierarchy in the day-to-day running of the Church are not to be lightly set aside. Tenderness is due in the first place to those who have thought it right to obey even though it seemed to mean the loss of what was no less dear to them than to their dissenting brethren. Many have suffered, but they have not lost the “ecclesial” sense, the sense of the Church.

All the same, one principle which is complementary to that of obedience to church authority has not had much attention paid to it: the real principle of the authority of tradition. Our faith and worship have not come down to us merely or even mainly because the Church has decreed this or that, though certainly these decrees have played their part. Nevertheless they are only one element. They did not create our faith or our worship. The legislative element in the Church is no substitute for either the creative or the critical. As faith is deeper than its definitions so is worship larger than its regulations. We have moreover the paradoxical juncture of the new look’s having been imposed on us with all the authoritarianism of the Tridentine Church. It seems to have been forgotten that the liturgy is not the property of the authorities or the experts: it belongs to the whole *laos* of God and not least to the *laity*, the faithful, so many of whom have been wounded in their soul’s very depths. But time and second thoughts will tell, and it is not through confrontation that the tide will start — has started — creeping in again. Where popular use is concerned, old habits and forms have a way of reasserting themselves. By a sort of osmosis — for the past is everywhere with us — we shall see some hard lines yielding to older contours.

The Tridentinist movement is evidence of a very real malaise. The reform (in the liturgy at least) has gone too far, too fast; but the solution of the problem does not appear to be to canonize our current divisions. Instead we have patiently and constructively to aim at the reform that should have been, and which anyway should have taken a generation or two to come about: something more modest and traditional and genuinely far-reaching than for the most part we have yet experienced.

REVEREND DERYCK HANSHELL, S.J.