



*La Caridad Church, Camagüey, Cuba*

## THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME IN LITURGY

The banning of the so-called Tridentine rite when the *Missa normativa* was introduced had an effect counter to the one intended. So far from achieving unity through uniformity a near schism became an actual schism when Archbishop Lefebvre rejected rapprochement with Rome and ordained four bishops. Beneath the surface of uniformity meanwhile there had been little union of hearts and minds. A large section of the faithful only unwillingly conformed. When there was an opportunity to attend a Tridentine Mass they took it. In England notably this was the case owing to Paul VI's indult which favored such opportunities with the permission of the local ordinary.

This, of course, is now old history since the Tridentine Mass may be legitimately celebrated whenever and wherever there is a call for it. The plain perception behind this new ordering is that in present circumstances uniformity so far from fostering unity may be the death of it. For a considerable portion of the faithful the previous rite moves them to devotion and the present one does not. The *Missa normativa* as usually practiced (and this is to be emphasized) has failed to win them over.

It would, however, be unsatisfactory if things were to be left like this. There are subjective elements certainly in devotion, but the Mass is more than "a devotion." If it is to have the Church's sanction there must be something fundamentally *right* in the way Mass is celebrated and in the way in which we participate in it. Nor can there be two "rights" in fundamental opposition to one another. If there can be a right there can also be a wrong.

Mischief in fact can lie in speaking of the "old" and the "new" rites, and to do so has been deprecated in official documents. Even to use the terms "reformed" and "unreformed" could give the impression that the so-called unreformed rite was somehow corrupt. We should do well to speak of "revised" and "unrevised," and still better of the present and the previous *editions* of the Roman rite. The continuity of the present with the past would then be suggested, and this is the key to the whole matter.

Secondary elements matter to the extent that what is primary is bound up with

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and given expression through them. For some, these secondary elements have so failed to express the Mass as they have hitherto experienced it that they have declared the present rite invalid. For others at the other extreme — and likewise a much diminished group — the present rite does not and is not meant to express what the previous one did, and they are glad of it. While for the majority between these two extremes validity is not in question, the two rites are seen as at odds with one another in their interpretation of the Mass. The differences between them are held to be irreconcilable. On the one hand there is Godwardness, ceremony, silence, and Latin. On the other there is manwardness, informality, the raised and continuous voice, and the vernacular. The one is *preconciliar*, the other *post*. Continuity is virtually confined to the words of consecration.

Of course this is a caricature. Differences are a good deal more blurred, and much that is in common remains. There was indeed a time when the “card table” altar was in favor, but this was in defiance or ignorance of the official ruling that the altar wherever possible be made of stone. Altars may have been brought forward but altars they remain. The priest might now face the people but it is the Sacrifice of the Mass that he offers as he always has done along with the people, “my sacrifice and yours.” He may have discarded the maniple (not that he has to, any more than the biretta) but the vestments that he wears are what they were previously, with sometimes trendy variations. In fact, there is no instruction to bring the altar forward to the middle or the edge of the sanctuary, and it is no more than recommended (*praestat*) that it be detached from the wall. We have in fact to distinguish between what has been decreed and the interpretation widely and uncritically put upon it. Moreover, even the decrees of a general council can be susceptible of *relectio*, of being “re-read” in the light of future developments, and of receiving an ampler expression.

One such query could be directed at *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself, the conciliar decree on the liturgy. A “noble simplicity” we there read is what should characterize the liturgy. However, as anthropologists such as Victor Turner have pointed out, mankind’s cultic celebration is not characterized by simplicity: it is in fact complex. To express in human cultic terms the Eucharistic mystery — this is the glory of the historic Mass. Maritain once described the Mass as a “slow dance.” Such a “dance,” having form and meaning, is not to be had without the equivalent of choreography and those trained in its movements. Of course, some ceremonial elements can be overdone. To prune, however, should not be to destroy. If the conciliar document itself can be open to criticism, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility for lesser rulings to call for second thoughts.

The bishops seem to have concluded that the experts’ work in issuing the new norms and instructions must be regarded as beyond the competence of mere diocesans to discuss. How much upset we should have been spared had they decided to test the ice before putting their full weight on it. Could not pilot schemes have been devised to educate the faithful in the significance of the reforms, to test their readiness for them, and not least to observe warning lights where the *sensus fidelium* found a serious preference for the old? On their part, the faithful could no doubt feel that many a good bishop was no happier than they were with the turn things had taken.

Leaving aside the sizeable body of don’t-knows and don’t-very-much-cares, what of the other, the approving, the enthusiastic side of the divide? This was led by the *periti* or rather by the popularizers of what the *periti* were all supposed to hold. Everywhere pastoral centers gave out the party line. In some countries there was a whole penumbra of asinities. Later generations will hardly credit what is to be read in James Hitchcock’s *The Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism* (1971). From the

first, however, Rome was on the alert as the pages of *Notitiae*, the official bulletin, bear witness. There is material there for a history of the aberrations committed in the name of the reform. Altogether these are covered by one word, *desacralization*, and it is with this that the third *Instructio* (1970) was largely concerned.

From the rite itself with its annotations and from the comments in *Notitiae* it is quite clear that the *Missa normativa* expressed the same doctrine as its predecessor, and is to be approached and celebrated with no less care and reverence. The doctrines of the sacrifice and of the real presence are fully maintained, and where care and reverence are shown in the celebration of the *Missa normativa* the devotion of the faithful is aroused and nourished.

Is all therefore well? With the Tridentine rite now available wherever there is practically a demand for it and priests can be found to celebrate it, should not we all be more or less happy? However, where differences remain unresolved, can we afford to be in that state of mind? Catholics, wherever they may be, should be enabled to worship with fulness of devotion and without nagging reservations.

We must grasp straight away that the main cause for contention is over *ceremonial*. By this word is meant the complex of actions and attitudes through which in the first place the *sacral*, the sense of the holy, is conveyed. Priests are not born *leitourgoi* any more than they are born to the ballet and can dance without being taught. Nevertheless, all can learn the basic disciplines of the sanctuary, and all need to do so if they are to play their part. Rubrical direction is a necessity. If some of the Tridentine *minutiae* are excessive and were rightly dropped, the trouble with the *Missa normativa* is that the rubrics are too often inadequate. Liturgical Rousseauism has been at work, as if the fewer the rules the nobler the simplicity. For instance celebrants need to be told (and shown) exactly how to “extend” their hands when reciting the *orationes*, and what to do with them in conclusion. There is all the difference between a measured movement and one that is gauche or perfunctory. The voice also needs to be moderated according to the exigencies of the rite. Through repetition the canon or Eucharistic prayer is bound to be familiar, and it calls for a somewhat lowered voice which better conveys the Godwardness and awe which should characterize it. In any case, it is more important to know what is being done than to hear what is being said. It is the priest’s actions that tell all.

One need not go into further detail. The people at once respond to the right signals. Of course, where the vernacular is concerned matters would be helped by a better English version. Whether the promised revision fulfils our expectations remains to be seen.

The liturgy of the word certainly is properly celebrated “facing the people” and from that part of the sanctuary which is nearest to them, while no church should be without a pulpit or a substantial ambo. The liturgy of the word is of its nature *versus populum*. But the rest of the Mass in general is *versus Deum*, and even before the sacrificial part, it is best led by the celebrant on the near side of the altar and facing it. How eloquent of what is to come would then be his mounting to the altar for the offertory.

Tridentinists are apt to be surprised when they learn that in the old missals there is a rubric envisaging celebrations *versus populum*. Godwardness can be and is to be preserved even when priests officiate facing the people. In mind at least the priest at the offertory turns away from the people. With them he is turned to what must now be his and their preoccupation, the sacrifice and communion upon it. This part of the Mass is not a proclamation in the same way as is the liturgy of the word. A proclamation it is indeed, but as an expression of awe and adoration. The ignoring of the distinction has bedevilled the reformist approach. The solemn actions surrounding the consecration are not understood as *language* in itself appropriate to

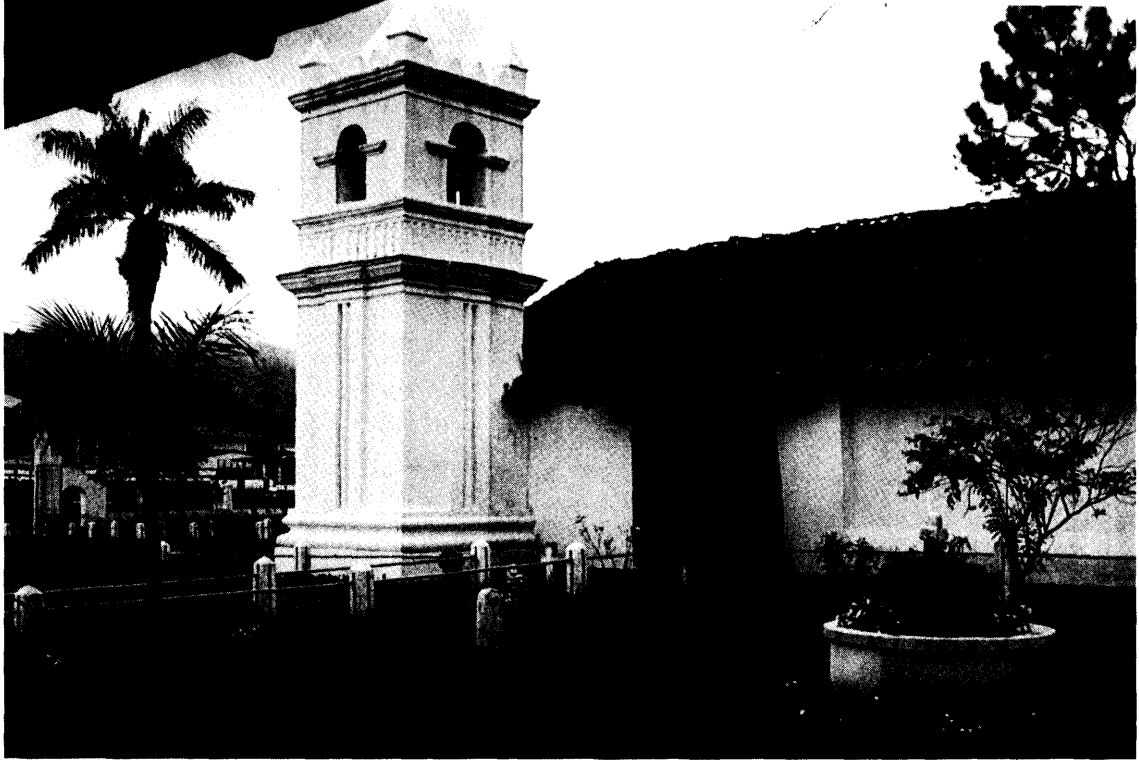
“proclaim” the mystery. The acclamations inserted in the revised rite are therefore *de trop*. For the reformers the Mass throughout is predominantly proclamation by word of mouth. Hence the emphasis on *versus populum*. The reformers in their zeal have emphasized *word* at the expense of action, of movement better suited to express the inexpressible. Even if he is facing them during the Eucharistic prayer, the priest’s eyes are not on the people nor in the first place is his voice directed to them. They, as it were, overhear what he says. When he shows where his own attention is focused, that is on the altar, the people’s attention is focused there too.

There is freedom, of course, for the priest to face the people for the whole of the Mass, and those who favor the freedom to do otherwise will respect the converse choice. Following the official instruction, however, sanctuaries in future should be so designed as to make possible both the one way and the other. It may be that sanctuaries can be so reordered as not to spoil the architectural perspective. Otherwise, reordering in the first place should not have been attempted. In some cases it may be feasible, where this is also desirable, to revert to the previous layout. Setting and celebration should accord.

Between Latin and the vernacular there should be no antagonism. This, as we have seen, is not the real division which is over sacrality — and there is room for both. It was by no means the council fathers’ intention to exclude Latin from the revised rite. Gone now are the days when bishops could ban Latin in their dioceses. What did they make of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and its assertion that Latin remains the official language of the western liturgy? Especially do we need to appreciate the “treasury” of church music — associated with Latin — of which the council documents speak. Gregorian plainchant in particular is every Catholic’s birthright, and this is transcultural. In a unique manner it is *holy* music. No one wants to ram Latin down anyone’s throat, but while few would want to go back on the vernacular there are many nevertheless who love the Latin Mass, though some associate this exclusively and wrongly with the Tridentine rite. Few of those who love the Latin Mass are in fact latinists, nor do they need to be. Apart from the music which says so much, bilingual missals are available for both the previous and the present rites. With relative ease seminary students can master Latin sufficiently for liturgical purposes. To help them and others there is at least one Latin tutor on the market (*A New Approach to Latin for the Mass*, published by the [British] Association for Latin Liturgy, 16 Brean Down Avenue, Henleaze, Bristol BS9 4JF. There is also a tape for pronunciation). If a parish cannot rise to a full sung Latin Mass what is to prevent its having at least Latin singing, the *Gloria*, the *Credo* etc? Cathedrals and other prominent churches ought to promote Latin in due measure and to present the full range of plainchant, polyphonic and choral masterpieces.

Whereas hitherto it has been anathema to mingle elements of one rite with those of another, the recent permission to use the revised lectionary in Tridentine Masses is a hopeful development. It presages a desirable fusion of the two rites in a single one combining the advantages of both, and available whether in Latin or the vernacular. It might be objected that in a number of language groups prayers have been composed which have no Latin equivalent. So far as Latin is concerned, however, this could seem less of a drawback when we consider the quality of the new prayers, turned out by the score. Ours is not a creative period for liturgy, which must spring from the soil of a living religious culture and is not a committee product. We have nevertheless a still living *tradition* and it is for us to preserve it. Only so when the time is ripe shall we see genuine liturgical creativity. However, for that to come about our western world must first be reconverted.

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# SACRED MUSIC

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