



Missouri Division of Tourism

Basilica of St. Louis, King of France (Old Cathedral), St. Louis, Missouri

HOW CAN YOU HAVE A LATIN MASS?

Some time ago I was at dinner in a clerical gathering after Confirmation in a parish church. About ten priests were present at table with the bishop. One pastor called down to me to inquire how well the Latin high Mass in my parish was attended. Before I could reply, a young priest sitting next to me interjected, "How can you have a Latin Mass?" I did not have time to answer either question, because the bishop spoke up and said to the young priest, "Father, not only does Monsignor not need to explain how he has a Latin Mass, but rather those who do not have one should explain why they do not." After that, as the Holy Scriptures put it, "they asked him no further questions."

But the fact remains that many people, including a great number of priests, think, quite erroneously, that the decrees of the Vatican Council abolished the use of Latin in the Catholic Church. I have often had priests ask me what kind of special permission I have applied for to have a regularly scheduled Latin Mass. The truth is that the Vatican Council has *ordered* the use of Latin while at the same time *permitting* the use of the vernacular languages. No permission need be applied for to celebrate Mass in Latin.

Without getting into the question of how such misinformation came to be

accepted by so many people in this country and what kind of a campaign of confusion brought this about, this article will try to present the legislation issued by the Church on the use of Latin since the bishops of the Second Vatican Council voted to permit the vernacular in our liturgy.¹

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in Article 113 gives fundamental information on the use of the vernacular: "As regards the language to be used, the provisions of Article 36 are to be observed: for the Mass, Article 54; for the sacraments, Article 63; and for the divine office, Article 101."

Article 36. Particular law remaining in force, the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites. But since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended. This will apply in the first place to the readings and directives, and to some of the prayers and chants, according to the regulations on this matter to be laid down separately in subsequent chapters. These norms being observed, it is for the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, to decide whether, and to what extent, the vernacular language is to be used; their decrees are to be approved, that is, confirmed, by the Apostolic See. And, whenever it seems to be called for, this authority is to consult with bishops of neighboring regions which have the same language. Translations from the Latin text into the mother tongue intended for use in the liturgy must be approved by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned above.

Article 54. In Masses which are celebrated with the people, a suitable place may be allotted to their mother tongue. This is to apply in the first place to readings and the "common prayer," but also, as local conditions may warrant, to those parts which pertain to the people, according to the norm laid down in Art. 36 of this constitution. Nevertheless 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. And whenever a more extended use of the mother tongue within the Mass appears desirable, the regulation laid down in Art. 40 of this constitution is to be observed.

Article 63. Because the use of the mother tongue in the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals can often be of considerable help to the people, this use is to be extended according to the following norms: a) The vernacular language may be used in administering the sacraments and sacramentals, according to the norm of Art. 36. b) In harmony with the new edition of the Roman Ritual, particular rituals shall be prepared without delay by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22 of this constitution. These rituals, which are to be adapted, also as regards the language employed, to the needs of the different regions, are to be reviewed by the Apostolic See and then introduced into the regions for which they have been prepared. But in drawing up these rituals or particular collections of rites, the instructions prefixed to the individual rites in the Roman Ritual, whether they be pastoral and rubrical or whether they have special social import, shall not be omitted.

Article 101. In accordance with the centuries-old tradition of the Latin rite, the Latin language is to be retained by clerics in the divine office. But in individual cases the ordinary has the power of granting the use of a vernacular translation to those clerics for whom the use of Latin constitutes a grave obstacle to their praying the office properly.



Study of these basic conciliar texts by canon law experts has brought many points to light. Prof. Georg May states that the sentence in Article 36, "the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin rites," employs the subjunctive verb, *servetur*, clearly expressing a command, not merely a recommendation.²

The word, *usus*, commands the actual employment of the Latin language and not simply the possibility of its being used. And yet, Father Frederick R. McManus, who directed the liturgical reforms in this country, wrote in *Worship* that "it may be that in some areas retention (of Latin) will simply mean employing the Latin texts as the basis for translation into the vernacular."³

Prof. May insists that the principle set forth in Article 36, commanding the preservation of the use of Latin, is to be considered the ruling, fundamental principle in explaining all legislation of the Council pertaining to the vernacular. Every interpretation which violates this principle errs against the sense of the constitution and the will of the fathers of the Council. The vernacular is allowed in addition to Latin; the primacy of Latin may not be assaulted in the process.

The second sentence of Article 36 permits the use of the vernacular in certain parts of the liturgy, but it does not command its use or even urgently recommend it. It is simply permitted in clear contrast with the Latin which is ordered. The sentence gives several examples of places where the vernacular can be helpful, but by the very giving of examples, the conciliar fathers display their position that it is not their intention to allow an exclusive use of the vernacular in the liturgy. Further, when a national conference of bishops decides on certain use of the vernacular, the need of confirmation from Rome is required. At that point, a bishop in his own diocese has the right, but not however the duty, to permit the use of the mother tongue according to the limit conceded.

Article 54 establishes a universal prescription that the use of the vernacular is limited to Masses celebrated with the people present. Masses in Latin with the people present must continue to be celebrated, since Article 54 also orders that "steps be taken so that the faithful may be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them." Obviously such an order cannot be carried out unless the faithful have sufficient opportunity to attend Masses in which Latin is recited or sung. People today attend Mass regularly only on Sundays and holydays (and in dwindling numbers, as pastors are observing). Therefore, these Latin Masses must be celebrated on Sundays and holydays, and not just at one regularly scheduled hour, but at varying times so that all might have the opportunity for Latin. Unfortunately, in many American dioceses, local legislation, far from fostering the direct orders of the Council on Latin, has actually prohibited its use in laws directly in conflict with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.⁴ A misinterpretation of Article 40 and Article 54, #3, in far too elastic a way and without the restrictions of Article 54, #2, and Article 36, #1, leads to such extreme shifts into the vernacular and the total elimination of Latin.

In 1967, the Holy See issued its Instruction on Sacred Music, the official document implementing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy with regard to sacred music. Chapter VI is devoted to the "language to be used in sung liturgical celebrations." The very words of the conciliar fathers are repeated and given emphasis: "Pastors of souls should take care that besides the vernacular the faithful also know how to say or sing, in Latin also, those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them."⁵ This is, again, a repetition of the same order given in 1964 in the Instruction for the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.⁶ The 1967 instruction orders that "in sung liturgical services celebrated in Latin, Gregorian chant, as proper to the Roman liturgy, should be given pride of place, other things being equal."⁷ These in-



structions merely reinforced the orders of the Council and in no way changed them.

Other documents from Rome, directed to more specific groups, have continued the same conciliar directions on the use of Latin. In 1966, an instruction on the liturgical formation of seminarians was issued. It states very clearly that the "language of the liturgy, both at Mass and in the divine office, in seminaries will be Latin which is the language of the Latin Church, a knowledge of which is required of all clerics."⁸ It adds that occasionally Mass may be celebrated in the vernacular in seminaries, but that must not be to the detriment of Latin nor become the general rule.

An instruction was issued to religious in 1965, ordering the use of Latin in the sung offices of clerics, but allowing varying degrees of the vernacular for those not in Holy Orders and for nuns.⁹ But even in those cases, the reminder is given that they must know and sing chants in Latin. It points out that the learning of Latin should not present an insuperable obstacle to those who are relieved of the distractions of the world and can devote themselves completely to its study. The Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, issued a letter to the superiors of religious orders and warned them that "if this language, noble, universal and admirable for its spiritual vigor, if the Gregorian chant that comes from the depths of the human soul — if these two things be removed, then the choir of the monasteries will become like an extinguished candle which no longer illuminates or attracts the attention of the minds of men."¹⁰ He said that the "Church looks to the religious to preserve the ancient beauty, gravity and dignity of the divine office in both language and chant."

In September, 1973, the Holy Father wrote to Cardinal Siri of Genoa through his secretary of state, Cardinal Villot. The words were occasioned by a meeting of a national Italian congress of sacred music. The letter states:

The Vicar of Christ once more expresses the desire that Gregorian chant be preserved and performed in monasteries, religious houses and seminaries as a privileged form of prayer in song and as an element of supreme cultural and pedagogical value. Referring, then, to the numerous requests from several quarters that the Latin Gregorian chant of the *Gloria*, the *Credo*, the *Sanctus*, the *Pater noster*, the *Agnus Dei*, etc. should be kept for all countries, he renews the recommendations that a suitable way should be studied to enable this wide-spread desire to become a reality and to keep those ancient melodies as voices of the universal Church, so that they will continue to be sung also as an expression and manifestation of the unity that pervades the whole ecclesial community.¹¹

On October 12, 1973, Pope Paul addressed the members of the *Consociatio Internationalis Musicae Sacrae*. He said:

We must praise those who try to preserve in the traditional liturgical repertory those chants that were, until recently, sung universally in Latin and with Gregorian chant. Those chants are very well suited to community singing, even for the faithful of different countries at the moments so particularly belonging to the Catholic liturgy. Such are, for example, the *Gloria*, the *Credo* and the *Sanctus* of the Mass.¹²

The latest reminder from Rome of the wishes of the Vatican Council came from the Holy Father himself through a letter from Cardinal Knox, then prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship, directed to all the bishops of the world.

A collection of chants in Latin entitled *Iubilate Deo* accompanied the letter. Since this important document has not been as yet printed in *Sacred Music*, it is reproduced here. It should leave little doubt that Latin is the language of the Church and one needs no permission to use it. Rather the one who does not, in the face of the repeated admonitions from Rome, must explain why he does not.

MSGR. RICHARD J. SCHULER

LETTER OF CARDINAL KNOX

Several times recently the Holy Father has expressed the wish that Catholics of all nationalities should know some Latin chants for the Mass, for example, the *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Pater Noster* and *Agnus Dei*. In response to this we have prepared the enclosed booklet, *Iubilate Deo*, which contains a "minimum" repertoire of such chants. I have the honor and the pleasure of sending it to Your Eminence (Your Excellency) as a personal gift from the Holy Father.

I should also like to recommend to your initiative and judgment the effort that this document represents to foster the wishes of the Council: "It should be arranged that Catholics can sing or say together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass that belong to them."

When the faithful gather for prayer they illustrate the variety that is present "from every tribe, language and nation." They also emphasize a fundamental unity in faith and in the bond of charity. That there is variety is evident. The number of languages used at Mass, the songs and hymns in local vernaculars, all express the same faith but also what is unique in the religious experience of each people. Both of these things find their legitimate expression in the liturgy, in harmony with the culture and traditions of a particular community.

The use of Latin and Gregorian chant, however, will serve to underline the unity of the Christian people in a particular way, and a way that seems quite reasonable. The chant of the Roman Rite has fed and supported both faith and devotion in the liturgy which it accompanies. The artistic worth to which it has attained alone is a good reason for it to be considered an inheritance of immense value to the Church. The Council, moreover, recognizes Gregorian chant as proper to the Roman liturgy.

One of the principal aims of the liturgical reform has been the promotion of congregational singing, to allow the people to express the festal and fraternal character of the liturgy. "The liturgy is a nobler thing altogether when it is sung, with the ministers fully participating, each according to his degree, and with the full participation of the people." This particular aspect of the reform is important to those who are concerned in it, but its presentation involves certain difficulties. This Congregation therefore renews its appeal to promote and increase congregational singing.

As far as songs and hymns in the vernacular are concerned, the reform is an occasion "to use one's faculties, inventive spirit and pastoral acumen." Poets and composers therefore, are encouraged to put their energies at the service of this cause to build up a corpus of popular music worthy to be used in praise of God, in the liturgical action; worthy also of the faith it expresses as well as being of sufficient standard artistically.

This reform has opened up new avenues for Church music and hymnody to explore. "We await a new flowering of religious music today, so that in each nation we can worship in our own tongue without losing the beauty and expressive power of a music that fully belongs to our language."

At the same time, however, this reform cannot and does not repudiate the past. It tries to "guard carefully." This means evaluating the contents of our highly cultured and artistic tradition and fostering those elements within it that outwardly express and serve the unity of believers. To have a minimal repertoire of Gregorian chant would be fully in accord with this need and would make it easier for Catholics to associate themselves in worship both with their brethren of today and of past centuries. For this reason then, the encouragement of congregational singing must consider Gregorian chant seriously.

The coming of the Holy Year in 1975 is another reason for this need to be met. During the year many Catholics of different languages, origins and nationalities will be celebrating the presence of their common Lord side by side.

Lastly, particular attention to the balance between vernacular music and chant must be paid by those whose vocation it is to be more closely involved in the life of the Church and to understand it more fully. That is why the Pope recommends that "Gregorian chant be preserved and used in monasteries, religious houses and seminaries as a chosen form of singing and as an element of the utmost cultural and educational value." Furthermore, the study and practice of the chant "is of great importance as the foundation of an education in Church music, because of its unique qualities."

In presenting to you this gift of the Holy Father, I am sure that Your Eminence (Your Excellency) will allow me to refer to his often repeated desire that the implementation of the conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy be rendered more and more complete. You will be able to decide after consultation with diocesan and national authorities in liturgy, music, pastoral practice and catechetics, what is the most suitable and effective way to teach the chants contained in *Iubilare Deo* and to encourage the preservation and execution of Gregorian chant in the institutions mentioned above. This will be a further service to the renewal of the liturgy for the good of the Church.

The booklet can be reproduced without charge for copyright. To facilitate understanding of the Latin text a translation may be added.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity of conveying to you my respects and good wishes, assuring you that I am

Yours sincerely in the Lord,
James Cardinal Knox
Prefect.

NOTES

1. Cf. Richard J. Schuler, "By Whose Authority," *The Wanderer* (Saint Paul, April 4, 1968), Vol. 101, No. 14, p.2; "Implementation or Deterioration," *Ibid.*, (November 30, 1967), Vol. 100, No. 48, p. 4; "Who Killed Sacred Music," *Triumph* (Washington, March 1969), Vol. IV, No. 3, p. 21-23.
2. *Sacred Music and Liturgy Reform after Vatican II* (Saint Paul: North Central Publishing Co. 1969), p. 18-21.
3. Vol. 38, No. 6, p. 351.
4. Cf. *Sacred Music and Liturgy Reform after Vatican II*, p. 22-23.
5. Article 47.
6. Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, September 26, 1964, Article 42.
7. Article 50.
8. *Instructio de Sacrorum Alumnorum Liturgica Institutione* from the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, Article 15.
9. Decree for Religious regarding Latin Usage in the Liturgy and the Divine Office. Nov. 23, 1965.
10. The Holy Father's words in 1964 have proved to be prophetic.
11. Cf. *Sacred Music* (Spring 1974), Vol. 101, No. 1, p. 22-23.
12. Cf. *Sacred Music* (Summer 1974), Vol. 101, No. 2, p. 3-4.



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