

ORATE FRATRES

We make a point of explaining the rite once a year, in the parish bulletin preceding the feast of the Presentation. In the actual administration, we present the prospective mothers with the excellent 4-page translation of the rite published by Pio Decimo Press, and tell them to keep it, and occasionally to pray its chief prayer in their homes either privately or with their family. We give the blessing individually to each mother, rather than to several together: this of course takes more time, but the occasion is important enough for each person concerned to warrant this special attention.

THEY WANT ENGLISH

IN 1932 I was a student in Germany. I lived in Munich for two months to learn the language. Then I went to Maria Laach for the course at the Liturgical Academy, which had been started by the then Abbot Herwegen, whom I revered. There were six students and the faculty outnumbered us five to one. Or perhaps more than that, because 90% of the fifty monks had at least one Ph.D. Many of them had two such degrees, some of them three.

I suppose it was the only school in the world that had more faculty members than students. Abbot Herwegen himself lectured to five of us on the relation of art to the liturgy. He lectured twice a week all the nine months and covered, in that time, the first fifty years of the 12th century. But not completely. Time ran out, not his knowledge; and he never used a single note or any sort of book.

Just after the end of the last war I was in Luxembourg. I hired a car, got a lunch packed and drove up the Moselle past Coblenz to Maria Laach to see Abbot Herwegen. He had died a week earlier. I looked at his grave, had lunch with the monks, and drove back out of desolate Germany, made more desolate by a great man's death.

I thought it ironic. On the roadside you would see burnt-out tanks and demolished cars amid the rubble. And you couldn't step on the roadside without stepping on either a mine or a gasoline can. You didn't mind it too much, even when the people walking the highway would ask for a few drops of gasoline for their cigarette lighters. I got rather a shock, though, to see a tank at the side of the road not five miles from the monastery. That, thank God, was as close as they got. That, too, was as close as the monastery got to destruction since its foundation in 1099.

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THE APOSTOLATE

While I was there, the first time in 1932, I was talking to one of the Ph.D. monks about Hitler. That maniac was just coming into power. Both of us knew what it would mean. I had seen enough Nazi parades and heard enough speeches to last me the rest of my life. Any detached observer, like my Benedictine friend, could know what was bound to happen to a people who would allow themselves to be led by such a madman as Hitler.

During the conversation the monk made a remark that I have never forgotten. I don't suppose I shall ever forget it, because it went to the heart of the matter. After all the hundreds of books, the thousands of speeches, the war trials, and the millions of private conversations on the subject of World War II, I think he forecast the problem and the issue in one sentence. He said, "This would never have happened in Germany if we had had the liturgy in German."

What he meant was that the people had never learned to pray properly in the form established by the 2000 years of Christian life. They had the re-presentation of the redemptive acts of our Lord in the Mass, but they were barred from it by the language, just as they had become barred from the sanctuary by the communion railing.

In that year (1932) I saw an illustration of that frustration in Cologne Cathedral. As you know, in that ultimate of Gothic structures, the altar is so far away from the nearest layman that you need a pair of field glasses to see it. The layman could get only to the communion railing. From there to the altar is about a half block. Perhaps I exaggerate. Maybe it is only one-fourth of a city block.

But the Cardinal of Cologne knew what was up. He knew of the separation and he must have known, being an efficient German, the exact number of feet of the separation, i.e., the exact distance between the rail and the altar. So he caused another altar, a small altar, to be placed five feet from the rail. It was an altar without ornamentation. The irony in the thing is that it was called "the *parish* altar"! I never learned what they called the enormous altar back up against the windows in the apse. Could it have been named the "non-parish altar"?

In April of this year I drove past Cologne on the autobahn to Frankfurt. I didn't stop, but I kept thinking how everyone thought it wonderful that the Cologne Cathedral had escaped the universal destruction that fell on the rest of the city. I wondered. It really wouldn't have been such a loss, because people could never pray in it properly anyhow.

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Bizarre article written in 1951 by the founder of the "Leaflet Missal Company" (St. Paul, Minnesota).

ORATE FRATRES

If these observations mean anything, they mean that both architecture and language had barred the Germans from the altar, which is Christ. When the time of national temptation came, they accepted a false leader, fell away from the altar and pulled the pillars of their houses down upon themselves.

Anyone reading this far will say it can't happen here. Can't it? If you are young enough, wait and see. Or, perhaps you don't have to be so young. I could see it happen myself, and I'm not so young anymore. Just ask yourself one question, "Do we in the U.S. pray in 1951 more properly than the Germans did in 1931?"

So now let us go to the man from Mars, or from whatever planet they are lately arriving from. He comes to go to Mass. He comes in. The church is small and the Mass of the Catechumens is in Latin. He can't hear it, because the priest has his back to the people and his Latin words resound against the wall. The man from Mars knows Latin. If the language were spoken audibly to him, he could understand it. He simply can't hear the words.

Even the man from Mars knows that we have perfected the loud-speaker system. On platforms, in night clubs, and even in seminary refectories, we have loudspeakers.

He wonders why we don't put one on the altar so the people in church can hear the Mass of the Catechumens. The priest, with his back turned to the people, says, in Latin: This lesson is the continuation of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

The man regards this as startling. Where he lives, a man speaking or reading to a group does not turn his back to them. He faces them.

The book is changed to the Gospel side. The people stand up. Now it is important, thinks the man, and he will turn about. But the priest doesn't. He reads inaudible Latin to the people, with his back to them, who would not understand even if he were facing them.

Some people say the answer to the problem here is to turn the altar around the way it originally was. That has been done in some places, but it doesn't do so much good. But if the Mass of the Catechumens were in English, there would be no problem. The altar would *have* to be turned around because the priest would feel it to be necessary. It would be foolish if he did not, because he would never think of turning his back on the congregation while he is speaking to them in the pulpit. He would also install a loud-speaker, if he knew he was not being heard by everyone in the church.

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THE APOSTOLATE

There is ample evidence that the people want to understand the Mass of the Catechumens. In my own lifetime I have seen that evidence increase beyond dispute.

In 1928 (I was ordained that year) I started a "missal class" in the St. Paul Cathedral. In it were 20 or 30 persons, mostly women, mostly the very devout. Perhaps 2 or 3 of the group had a missal. The rest knew it was the big book on the altar, and little else about it. The St. Andrew's Missal was on the market, badly translated and very bulky. Perhaps four other English editions were available. That was all. I should guess there were well under 50,000 copies of the missal in English in the U.S.A.

There were so few but I started a collection of editions. As the years went on, edition after edition appeared and I soon gave up this idea. There were too many.

Late in 1928 the *Leaflet Missal* began publishing. It is still published. A conservative guess is that, from then to now, well over 100 million copies of it have been put into the hands of the people.

Add to that all the imitations of the *Leaflet*, and all the other editions, and you'll come up with a tremendous number of copies: millions and millions.

I submit this as evidence that the people want to hear the Mass of the Catechumens, because they paid money for a *substitute* for hearing: a printed thing which they can *read* what they cannot *hear* while it is being *read* in Latin.

It is a financial argument, I admit, but we Americans understand that kind of argument better than others.

Nothing would please me more than to have the *Leaflet Missal* put out of existence by having the Mass of the Catechumens put into existence in the vernacular.

This, I submit, is a fairly strong argument, because I am one of the editors and half owner of the *Leaflet Missal*.

PAUL BUSSARD

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