

LATIN IS STILL PRACTICAL

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WITH a title of this nature the reader may perhaps expect an invitatory 'In Praise of Printing', followed by a bibliography of the various Missals in Latin and English designed for the laity, in prices ranging from the lowest for the poorest to the highest for those who are reputed to find it difficult to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But not every enthusiast for the liturgy is now a strong supporter of the Missal for the laity; there have been in recent months refreshing criticisms of the use of this book from men rightly reputed for their support of the liturgical revival. The Missal more often than not erects a barrier between the worshipper and the altar. In his enthusiasm to match his English with the Latin in the other column the missal-user may forget that he is taking part in an action and not in a linguistic exercise. That is the first point: the liturgy is an action; words are not. The liturgy must needs use words and language; but it is primarily something that we do and something that God does and not something that we say or that God says to us. We must keep the proportions that the Church has given to us from the beginning, and so cease from imagining that a liturgical language becomes unpractical when the majority of the worshippers do not understand it. Those things are practical in the liturgy which make it possible for the people to practise their religion, that is, to practise their worship, to take part in what is done at the altar. Language is to be judged practical in this respect not first of all by whether it is understood but by whether it makes the mysterious sacrifice of the body of Christ possible by the Mystical Body of Christ.

We are not here suggesting that Latin is a practical language because it provides a common language for a Universal Church. There are impressive stories of English priests journeying on the Continent and falling into easy conversation with some chance foreign clerical stranger in the railway compartment—in Latin. It is pleasant to be able to say 'Pater mi, video quod tu es sacerdos catholicus; ubinam debemus mutare vehiculas pro Aix-les-Bains?' But the argument of a universal language for a universal

Church wears thin when we approach it from the liturgical angle, since there have always been many different liturgical languages, Greek and Russian, Slavonic and Ethiopian.

At the same time it is perhaps inopportune to insist on the wide variety of languages used in the Church at a period when the spirit of nationalism is so strong within us all. In the recent past Catholicism has too easily been captured by the local totalitarianism; and the local powers are only too anxious to foster the spirit of patriotism in their Catholics' hearts by encouraging the use of the national language in their worship. The nationalism of the sixteenth century was largely responsible for the adoption of the English language in the Reformed Church, and in our own time had the Italian, Spanish or German Catholics been granted the use of their individual vernaculars in worship the leaders of their countries would have been nearer to trapping them into a national schismatic church. If a united States of the world ever became effective—a world really unified politically—then would the time be ripe for preserving the language of the individual peoples in their lives and in their worship. But today the vernacular possesses distinct dangers in the political field.

The line of argument to be pursued in this paper, however, lies apart from the question whether the individual or the Church as a whole should understand the language of the altar. We wish first of all to attack the spirit which seems to be behind a great deal of the Vernacularists' drive. Their heaviest cannons are labelled 'A Language Understood by the People', and with their guns they fire away at the Latinists with care-free abandon, often dropping their shells wide of the mark. Now, as has been indicated, we are creeping up on their lines ready to spike their particular guns while their shells continue to go rocketing up into the blue heavens of the prayer of the faithful. We crawl up to the Vernacularists' lines hidden in the quiet cloud of 'mystery'.

There is a great craze in these days for having everything 'plat and plain', as Mother Julian puts it, for the public; everything must be as clear as day and as neat and tidy as Aunt Os-munda's Victorian withdrawing room. There may be plenty to see but it must all be clearly seen in those delicate little glass-topped tables, each little trinket labelled with its appropriate tag. Here we find 'The Offertory Procession', 'The Lay Apostolate', 'The Good Catholic Family'. Some of the labels are a little

smudgy—'Peace' and 'War', for example—but we are anxiously awaiting Aunt Osmunda's duster and dear little copybook hand to make it as clear and clean as the rest of these pretty objects in her boudoir cases. We are all so 'literal minded'; we can only understand the man who calls a spade a spade and have no time for the poet who would call it the steel arrow that pierces the heart of Mother Earth and makes her fruitful to man. We want everything ironed out and clear and have no time for mystery. Truly the mind is restless in the unseeing cloud of faith. It is made to see and to see clearly. But man in his present state must remain restless, because there are so many things he cannot see clearly or explain. Perhaps it is science which, because it has revealed so many mysteries of nature, has led us to suppose that within a decade or two we shall know all about everything and be able to explain every truth. But of course it is not so. The pride of intellect bites deep down into the living flesh of our human existence and would kill it by the clarity with which it strives to see. We are however surrounded by many mysteries which no science this side of the grave will ever reveal. The character of my wife or husband, the actions of my tiresome neighbour, the sudden movement of my heart in love or in anger—none of these things will ever be clear to me before I die. They are always mysterious; but above all the everyday things of my religion remain mysteries. I can never satisfactorily explain the doctrine of transubstantiation however profoundly I master the thesis of matter and form. The Church has always fostered the idea of 'the Mysteries' and asked her children to accept what she, the Word of God made flesh, proposes to them. She does not first of all explain or make manifest, except in the sense of the Epiphany or the manifestation of God with us. Our Lord is manifest to us in such a brilliance of light that our eyes are unable to see; and, like the apostles on Mount Thabor, we are blinded by the sight—cheerfully, exultantly blinded. We long to accept the brilliance of our Lord's presence with us. What true lover ever wished to have his beloved diagnosed and set out in neat little parcels of explanation about character and motives? He accepts his beloved as she is, whole and complete. And so the child of God accepts his Beloved in the fullness of his brilliant presence without all the time demanding explanations of the radiance of love. He is content to live in the warmth of that light without a spectrum.

The liturgy has always been 'The Mysteries' for the Church. In the East the altar and its central celebration has for many centuries been veiled—notice the literally-minded westerners' reaction to that veil—it must be torn down so that he can see everything that happens. But these are *Arcana*—the early Christians turned out of church those who had not reached the heights of acceptance demanded by the faithful. They were turned out of church before 'The Mysteries' really began. The reality of God's presence with us in the Eucharist was shielded from the quizzical gaze of the infidel. Only those who could accept the presence of the Lord without question were admitted to the celebration of the liturgy. The rest of the world was not even encouraged to know that the faithful possessed this infinite treasure.

Now, it seems that a great deal of the impetus of the movement for introducing vernacular into the liturgy comes from this desire to make everything 'plat and plain' for the public in their worship. The public must not be puzzled, they should not be encouraged to wonder and marvel in case they should decide to turn to some other form of diversion which requires less acceptance and less effort of mind and will. At other forms of public gathering everything is handed to them on an open dish. The political speaker makes it his study to cajole in such a way that his most stupid and earthen hearers have the impression of being able to master the whole complexity of modern party and international politics. The cinema and television present no mysteries except mystery plots which the viewer is gratified to be able to unravel easily at the conclusion. The worship of God cannot stand in competition with all this L.C.M. of human intelligence and emotion. It makes complete and utter demands. We should entirely mislead the public worshipper if we were to give him the liturgy in English with the implication that he would be able to understand what the priest is saying and doing. The priest himself whether he says 'this is my Body' or 'Hoc est corpus meum' cannot understand what he is saying. Once a quite elderly priest came to the writer with doubts and scruples because he could only think of 'meum' as indicating himself, the priest rather than Christ. And a number of priests, who have thought they should be able to understand more precisely what they are saying, have ended in the scruple which makes them

repeat incessantly Hoc . . . hoc . . . hoc . . . hoc . . . Hoc, without being able to pursue the rest of the action of the Mass. The movement which began in the later Middle Ages of spotlighting the moment of consecration, the moment of sacrifice and so on, did nothing to assist the participation of the faithful in the liturgical action. They were held up by the desire to see the Host, to adore their Lord, rather than to offer themselves with him on the Cross. The vernacular movement is one of the final episodes of that tendency to particularize, a tendency to be bogged down by the wealth of details of which the liturgy possesses an infinite treasure. A religious who attempts to mean every word of every psalm he sings in the Divine Office will withdraw himself further and further from the spirit of prayer. Very early on the Church provided him with anthems which gave him the theme-song of each psalm and that provided him with ample sufficiency of nourishment for prayer to keep him occupied throughout the action of the psalm with all his brethren in the choir. The action of the Mass is so simple yet so infinitely profound and mysterious that it is easy to distract those who participate with fussy details and explanations. If they are trying to extract the meaning of every word they read—for they are not allowed in the Western rite to hear the most important words of the Canon—they will too easily miss their part. They will concentrate on the words of the priest, rather than on what they should be doing. In Eastern rites one has the impression of a variety of words and actions produced at the same time by the priest, his ministers, the choir and the people. Surely there is nothing in liturgical action to suggest that every one must be saying or doing exactly the same thing at the same moment. The High Mass never suggests this. The Prayer of the Canon was originally the prayer of the celebrant; everyone else remained quiet and in silence except for certain subdeacons who had their duty to do. But it was the priest's prayer; before he was admitted to this prayer he had to undergo an intensive training of mind and will over many years. He still does. When he comes to the altar for the first time after his ordination he is expected to know exactly what to say and do in *his* prayer. The training of the faithful for their part is of necessity less exacting because their part in this prayer is less active. They have to be prepared to offer sacrifice, to be united with our Lord on Calvary. This preparation will be far more effective if they are taught the

great movement of the Liturgy and how to stand (or if necessary to kneel) during the prayer. If they are taught first of all that at the moment when the priest says *Hoc est corpus meum* which being interpreted is 'This is my body', the bread is changed into the Body of Christ and they must adore the Real Presence, they will find it difficult to enter into the action. If they are taught the meaning of all the individual prayers of the Canon they will easily be confounded—for even the greatest liturgical experts find it difficult to gather these prayers into a unified whole.

No, the faithful must be taught how to enter into this greatest of mysteries, the greatest active mystery of their lives. The Latin language will help them here. It is still a practical language because it can help to convey the air of mystery to those who are taking part in the liturgical mysteries. The Greek, the Russian, the Slavonic, even the English in the Church of England—these languages at least retain something of the archaism which the ordinary person expects and rightly expects of a sacred action. These languages are sufficiently remote from the ordinary worshipper to allow him to overlook the meaning of each individual word in order to concentrate on the mystery, the action into which he is drawn, the mysterious action which he can never fully understand but to which he can commit himself utterly without reserve. The religious novice when he commits himself by profession to a complete life in his Order has only the most general comprehension of the life to which he is committing himself. He has to live a whole life-time in his Order before he can begin to say with confidence that he really knows what the life he embraced really is. The same may be said of the child led by his parents to baptism or confirmation; the same is obviously true of the bride and bridegroom at the altar rails. These two are on the threshold of a great sacrament, a great mystery, and it will remain a mystery to the end of their days. The more they realize that it is a mystery and that they will never completely understand the mystery of marriage the more likely they are to make a success of their married life. They will have entered into their mystery as the faithful must enter daily into the mystery of the Mass. Latin rather than English will assist this realization of the Mystery, because the ordinary faithful will not expect to be able to understand everything since from the first he does not understand the language in which it is framed.

There are evident places in the liturgy where the people are expected to listen and to understand. The instructional parts of the worship of God are preparatory to the real essence of that worship; and naturally we ought to favour the introduction of a tongue understood by the people where the liturgy of the Church has designed that the people should be instructed by the reading of the word of God. The dual reading first in Latin and then in English of the Epistle and Gospel on Sundays seems to suggest some mystical significance in the actual reading of the Latin which would give a false sense of the mystical value of the Latin language. Such unnecessary repetition is only one of many similar developments in the liturgy such as the reading of the Epistle and Gospel at the sedilia when the priest can hear them clearly sung by the Sub-deacon and Deacon in their appropriate positions in the liturgical action. The Holy See in the new Easter liturgies has shown that Rome realizes that the repetition of the celebrant's reading at the sedilia is unnecessary, so that we can look for a similar reform in the repetition of the Epistle and Gospel in Latin and English. We are not, therefore, suggesting that Latin is practical in every section of the liturgy. We would propose that the vernacular be introduced in the preparatory parts of the liturgy such as the Epistle and Gospel already mentioned. It is here that the vernacular missal can play such a useful part in the training of the faithful in the way to follow the action of the Mass. It should be used as a book of preparatory reading, discarded as soon as the liturgy proper begins. With the shortening and stream-lining of the Mass and the rest of the Liturgy we have lost the sense of the need of preparation. We come straight to church at the moment the Mass is due to begin; and even, during the last fifty years, the preparatory acts of faith, hope and charity have mostly been discarded. Rather than turn the liturgy into the vernacular should we try to insist that people should come to church prepared, having read their English missals for the Mass of the day, ready to recognize the general sentiments of the priest at the altar as he reads his Latin missal. This will give them the general understanding of the liturgy without the undue specialization which will distract them. Those who are more gifted and approximate more closely to the priest's education will be able to understand gradually more and more of the Latin read without losing the sense of the whole; just as the priest-in-training learns

more and more of the meaning of his words and actions. This gradually deepening preparation will preserve the sense of mystery in the action; it will not destroy the spirit of acceptance demanded by the sacrifice, the abandonment of the Cross.

Latin is still a practical language for the clergy in the West with their present standard of education, be they Irish, English, Spanish or of any other European nationality. So long as the clergy can enter into a Latin liturgy with mind and heart Latin will remain a practical language for worship. The vernacular should be introduced for the people only as a preparation. In fact the layman who aspires to be a sort of hybrid clergyman should be discouraged, not only because his knowledge of the minutiae of the rubrics will always irritate the average P.P. who rightly does not set so much store by these particularities; but also because he is most unlikely to have had the opportunity of the full ecclesiastical education which leads the priest to the altar. We need to stress not the vernacular but the hidden unknown *Arcana* of God; we must all of us learn the humility of seeing things in a glass darkly, knowing that we shall never know the explanation of all that works for our redemption until we have reached the full effect of that redemption in heaven. We need most urgently to learn how to take our part in the Action of the Mass. More and more, with running commentaries and explanations, every part of the liturgy is being turned into instruction. The faithful come to church primarily to worship, to offer sacrifice and not to learn. The church is being turned more and more into a school, and the vernacular movement is one of the many contributory works creating this change. No wonder people become increasingly bored at Mass. The Liturgical Movement as yet has done little to dispel this boredom because it fancies fancifully that people like to remain at school all their lives. The only thing which can dispel this boredom is a renewal of the sense of Mystery, of awe at entering the *Sancta Sanctorum*, the sense of an action round the altar into which they are to be drawn by their complete acceptance and offering. Less history, less linguistics, less translation and explanation, and more and more true religion—that is what we need today. And for that in the West the Latin liturgy remains the most practical. All we need to do is to forget the botherations about the vernacular and turn our attention to Worship.