

The Council and Liturgical Language¹

A Memorandum of Evidence

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At the annual general meeting of the Vernacular Society of Great Britain in April this year, it was decided that a memorandum of evidence, concerning the use of English and Latin in the liturgy, should be prepared by the executive committee and submitted to the preparatory commission for the sacred liturgy of the Second General Council of the Vatican. The recommendations put forward in this memorandum have provoked no small measure of interest among Catholics and non-Catholics alike, having been reported widely in the press at home and abroad, notably here in *The Times*, *Guardian*, and *Daily Telegraph*. They were welcomed in the religious press from the *Universe* to the *British Weekly*. I have a two-fold purpose in discussing them now: to explain something of the principles by which the committee were guided in formulating their recommendations, and to place the much discussed problem of liturgical language in the new perspective created by the approach of a general council of the Church.

The liturgical commission is one of ten preparatory commissions, together with certain secretariats and a central commission, established *motu proprio* by Pope John XXIII on Whit Sunday, 1960, and charged by him 'to prepare for the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council . . . their function being to study the subjects selected by us, while keeping before them the wishes expressed by the bishops and the proposals of the sacred congregations of the Roman curia'. The primary purpose of the Council had been defined a year earlier by the Pope as 'the growth of the Catholic Faith and the renewal along right lines of the habits of Christian people, and the adapting of ecclesiastical discipline to the needs and conditions of the present time'. In thanking the antepreparatory commission for the work of enquiry that it had successfully completed, the Pope spoke appreciatively of the 'two thousand replies which bishops and prelates have gladly sent with messages of goodwill'

¹Based on a paper read at Sion Convent in London, 11th November 1961.

and also of 'Catholic universities and institutes of ecclesiastical studies, moved by like desires, (who) have contributed proposals and results of research which will be of great benefit to the Church'.

I shall not in the least exaggerate if I say that in the lifetime of each person reading this, there can have been no Catholic experience so fundamentally important, no manifestation of Catholic life so vigorous, and no prospect of Catholic enterprise so stimulating as the advent of this general council of the Church. Let there be no mistake; this is no mere meeting of bishops, nor some conference of ecclesiastics, nor an affair of the clergy, but it is a council of the whole Church and as such the direct and immediate concern of every Catholic man and woman. The Holy Spirit indwelling, animating the Church so that she breathes with a divine life, is manifesting his influence throughout the whole body of the faithful, and he is prompting the people of God to a great and Catholic declaration of their faith, so that the world may unmistakably know that they are in the world that he has made, and that our Lord is still come that he may receive and be received. The members of Christ's body, the sharers in the royal priesthood of the Saviour, all participate in the work of the Church, sacramentally characterized by their baptism or confirmation or order, as the case may be, and encouraged and assisted by the hierarchically constituted authority of the Church. The gifts and endowments, whether of birth or training or education, which we bring to our daily work in the professions or manual labour or otherwise, are transfigured in God's gracious activity, which takes natural virtues and makes them issue in supernatural acts, by reason of their new principle of operation which is the Christian soul. Let us take care that we do not conceive the Council in exclusively legal terms. 'Then I looked and saw where the Lamb stood on Mount Zion, amidst a company of a hundred and forty-four thousand, with his name, and his Father's name, written on their foreheads'. So it is with the Council apocalyptically evoked, that each Catholic has some part to play, if not by actual participation in the sessions, still no less effectively by sharing in the preparatory work and responding to the lead given in this matter by the officials of the Holy See.

On 30th January this year Cardinal Koenig, Archbishop of Vienna, who is a member of the central commission, said at a press conference: 'If you have anything to say about the Council, do not wait for a bishop, or information from Rome. Speak when you think you ought to speak. If you make the Council your affair, then the Council will become the affair of the Church and of all the Christians. Speak of

what the public and the faithful expect from the Council'. On 7th July last, Mgr Willebrands, writing from the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, said 'His Eminence Cardinal Bea has asked me . . . to thank you for letting us all share these informative letters . . . it is so important that we catch the laymen's viewpoints, as well as those of the liturgical scholars . . . the problem of the vernacular is increasingly important . . . we doubly welcome, therefore, your sending us this material . . . I boldly suggest that you forward the like matter, and whatever other information on the vernacular—especially from the layman's side, you can muster, to the secretary of the liturgical commission'.

The president of the liturgical commission is Cardinal Gaetano Cicognani, and in general the presidents appointed to the preparatory commissions are the prefects or secretaries of the corresponding congregations in the Roman curia. It is natural that Cardinal Cicognani, being prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, should have been appointed to preside over the liturgical commission. The secretary of the liturgical commission is Fr Annibale Bugnini, C.M., a Roman professor and the editor of *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, to whom liturgical scholars have been indebted for many years for his edition of *Documenta Pontificia ad Instauratorem Liturgicam Spectantia* and other works. The long list of members and consultors of the commission includes J. B. O'Connell, R. R. McManus, R. Reinhold, J. A. Jungmann, S.J., Cyprian Vagaggini, O.S.B., A. M. Roguet, O.P., A. G. Martimort, Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., and many other men well known for years in the forefront of the liturgical movement. There are also several bishops, including one from Ireland, another from Poland, and a third from the Congo. When the committee of the Vernacular Society found themselves charged with the task of preparing a memorandum of evidence, one of their first actions was to communicate with Fr Bugnini, and they received his welcoming assurance that their memorandum could properly be sent direct to his commission. I must also say that its submission last month was cordially acknowledged by Fr Bugnini on behalf of the liturgical commission.

The memorandum is not very long, running only to some fifteen hundred words, because it was felt that since the end of the second world war there had been a very full discussion of the issues involved, and the arguments in favour of a change from Latin to English in the liturgy would be so well known to the commission that it would be superfluous to repeat them. The memorandum, which is in Latin and English, is set out in three parts, of which the first is preliminary and

briefly indicates the circumstances of its initiation and preparation, the second gives a short historical outline of the work and aims of the Society since its foundation (as the English Liturgy Society) in 1943, and the third contains the recommendations made *de linguae liturgicae reformatione*. After paying tribute to 'the splendid work of liturgical reform undertaken in the last twenty years by the Sacred Congregation of Rites', the committee suggest that the 'patient expectation of gradual but slow progress in liturgical reform has been profoundly changed by the advent of the Council', and that 'the Council, when it takes account of the needs of Christian people in contemporary society, may well set the pattern of liturgical development for another millenium'. They continue: 'We know from the teaching of the Church that the liturgy, especially in the language that is used, should be a genuine expression of the worship of the mystical body of Christ', and they conclude that 'the use of the people's own language is a practical necessity, at least in certain parts, if the liturgy is to be an adequate expression of public worship'.

'We humbly ask, therefore, as the principle to be adopted, that the normal liturgical language of the Roman rite in Great Britain be English, except where the local ordinary considers Welsh more suitable'. (*Rogamus igitur humiliter hanc normam, ut lingua liturgica pro ritu romano in Britannia Maiori sit anglica, excepto tamen casu in quo, iudicio loci ordinarii, cambrica uti convenit.*) This normative recommendation is, naturally, the most important that the committee had to make; succeeding paragraphs apply this principle to the mass, the sacraments and the divine office. The widespread desire among both clergy and laity for a more considerable use of English than is at present permitted in the sacramental rites as contained in the *Excerpta e Rituali Romano* is so well known as to require no further comment from me here. As regards the divine office, it was recommended that when it is publicly celebrated in church, with the people assisting (the English version of the memorandum says 'with the people present', but the Latin has *populo participante* which better expresses the committee's intention), then English should be used, but that a priest reciting his breviary should 'be allowed to use Latin or English as he prefers'.

For the mass the recommendation was that it should 'be said in English'. No distinction of functional parts was made, no division between the fore-mass (liturgy of the word) and the sacrifice (liturgy of the sacrament) was urged, no separation of the mass of the catechumens from the mass of the faithful was envisaged. Some surprise has

been expressed that so sweeping a recommendation was made, but the committee took the view that once the principle of English as the normal liturgical language was established, then exceptions for certain parts of the liturgy on functional and other grounds were logically difficult to justify. They had also to keep in mind the fact that the problem of language is an integral part of the reform of the liturgy, so that other structural changes in the rite of the mass (for instance, if the Canon were to be spoken aloud) might make the continuous use of English more necessary. At the same time the committee, anxious to affirm their grateful affection for the Latin order (*cuius grato animo memores sumus*), made a suggestion which has been misunderstood in some quarters. It is that 'the recurrent versicle *Dominus vobiscum*, with its response *Et cum spiritu tuo*, the bidding *Oremus* and the salutation *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus*, together with the existing Greek and Hebrew elements, might fittingly remain unchanged'. They are not easy to translate meaningfully, and they afforded a welcome opportunity 'to preserve a vestige' of the Latin rite. The November issue of the *Catholic Gazette* says of this: 'Incidentally in view of the sweeping arguments of the vernacularists, it seems absurdly timid of them to end by asking for the whole mass in English with the "*Dominus vobiscum*" about the only exception. This is swallowing a camel and straining at a gnat'. It will however be clear to you that it was no onset of pusillanimity or digestive disorder that prompted our reservation about these parts, but, I am proud to think, a proper sense of the historic grandeur and essential continuity of the rite of mass, planted in Aramaic, rooted among Parthians and Medes and Edomites, in Pontus or Asia, Phrygia or Pamphilia, Egypt or the parts of Libya around Cyrene, so that each heard tell of God's wonders in his own language (cf. Acts 2. 9-11), and flowering in earthy Latin speech as the imperial power perished, until in our own day we may hear a vibrant English and say again: 'Each of us hears them talking his own native tongue'.

Apart from our assumption 'that religious orders and congregations would be allowed to continue their use of Latin for conventual services, if they wish to do so', it is strange that greater attention was not paid in the press to a recommendation which was really of special importance. Some years ago Dr McDonald of Ushaw College wrote at the end of his essay on the Tridentine legislation in the symposium *English in the Liturgy*: 'The steady growth of devotion to the See of Peter in the last hundred years would seem to diminish the need for secondary signs of unity. The Pope is the divinely appointed centre and means of unity.'

Similarly the concrete unity of the Church is itself the chief bulwark against error. As the translation of the Bible has gone ahead under the direct control of the local authority, and the ultimate control of Rome, so it could be with the liturgy. It was to secure this safety from error that the local liturgies came under Rome's supervision many centuries ago. That same supervision can assure doctrinal safety in authorized experiments to-day'. It is commonly understood that the Fathers at the Council will want to devote some of their time to considering the role of the local bishop in the Church. The theologians preparing for the First Vatican Council in 1870 had prepared several schema on the nature, duties and powers of the episcopate, and the matter would have followed naturally on the similar schema concerning the papacy. Political events, as is well known, disrupted the agenda of that Council, so that only the first dogmatic constitution *De Ecclesia Christi* could be fully considered. Cardinal Koenig, at the press conference to which I have alluded, was reported in *The Tablet* (for 18th February, 1961) to have said 'that he expects the Council to bring about an increased recognition of the dignity of the office of a bishop, in such manner as to give greater weight to the decisions of regional interdiocesan meetings and national episcopal conferences. The emphasis, he said, will be on the principle of subsidiary function with a greater emphasis on devolution and decentralization, a reversal of the recent tendency towards centralization . . . (with) a greater local freedom in liturgy and language'. The distinction between papal and episcopal law in liturgical matters is a feature of recent instructions of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and the committee were anxious to show that they welcomed the prospect of the local bishop's being allowed a greater and more independent measure of control over the liturgy in his diocese. They said: 'It further seems to us desirable that the local bishop should have the power to require the use of Latin on certain occasions where in his judgement it would be more suitable'. We also felt that if English were to be used more extensively in Britain, it would be a good idea for the Hierarchies of England and Wales, and of Scotland (we would have liked to include the Irish Hierarchy, but that was outside our terms of reference as a Society—Great Britain, I understand, does not connote Ireland) 'jointly to commission and approve an official order, lectionary and musical accompaniments (*editionem typicam euclologii, lectionarii, adnotationum musicarum*'). At present in these islands three English translations of the *Rituale Romanum* are, or will shortly be, in public use: the *Excerpta* in England and Wales, the Irish *Collectio* in Ireland and Scot-

land, and the American *Collectio* among the United States forces serving here.

The memorandum, quite apart from the intrinsic value of its contents, can, I think, be regarded as a model of its kind. Before the first draft was prepared, members of the Society were invited to express their views in writing, so that the committee could take account of them, and there was an impressive response from priests and layfolk. The successive drafts, in both the English and Latin versions, were carefully discussed and amended in committee before their final approval. If hierarchy and people, as in Catholic action, are to collaborate in the apostolate, then I firmly believe that it is through such methods as these that the best results can be achieved. The publication of the memorandum in the press has done much good in acquainting the general (and non-Catholic) public with the work of the Council. Many of them may have come to realize that the Church, which they mistakenly but often think of as an intensely autocratic body, unsympathetic to any sort of democratic process, has established preparatory commissions, not unlike our own royal commissions, to receive memoranda of evidence and promote public discussion of the issues involved in the legislative work proposed for the Council. One of our bishops, not a member of the Society, has written to us: 'The discriminating will see an immense service rendered to Catholics by your example of representation, so reasoned, so decided, so respectful. The Lord bless and reward you'.

I have avoided speculation in this article, but I expect you are wondering how far I think our views, as expressed in the memorandum of evidence, will positively influence the commission, and ultimately the Council itself. I do not know and I am not going to essay any prediction. What I do know is that the Pope is well aware of the problems of liturgical language. It could scarcely be otherwise with one who was nuncio in Paris in the immediately post-war years. Last year the *Osservatore Romano*, reporting the Pope's visit on the second Sunday of Lent to the Tiburtino district, said summarily: 'The Pope referred to the teaching of the day in the missal and breviary. They are in Latin, he said, but with time the faithful will be prepared to penetrate ever increasingly into what is said and expressed in the sacred texts and in the official language of the Church'. The Vatican radio in its report of the Pope's remarks said that this meant there would be more of the vernacular. The reports in other Italian papers were much more explicit, and *La Stampa* of Milan, for instance, prominently quoted the Pope as saying: 'Slowly the Church will reduce the use of Latin in the liturgy in

favour of Italian to help the people to understand'. I suppose we shall never know exactly what the Pope did say on that occasion. There is, however, no mistaking the portent of his words given *motu proprio* in the apostolic letter promulgating the new rubrics for the missal and breviary last year: 'Having, under divine guidance, decreed that an Ecumenical Council should be convened, we have given much thought as to what could be done about this initiative of our Predecessor . . . for a general liturgical restoration . . . (and) after long and mature consideration we have reached the conclusion that the basic principles (*altiora principia*) . . . should be referred to the Fathers of the forthcoming Ecumenical Council'.

The Person and the Place—IV: Fontevrault¹

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Fontevrault is not one of the compelling architectural landmarks of the Val de Loire, like Saint-Benoît or Cunault. It is just a peaceful, rambling old place that one visits because its splendid name and all its connotations have a fascination of their own. The English remember that Henry II and Richard, Queen Eleanor and King John's wife were buried there, while the French will remind you that Bertrade de Montfort, the mistress of Philip I, took the veil there and died of her austerities. But beside its well known connections with royal families, there is the attractive contradiction of Fontevrault having housed women of quite another stamp—lepers, prostitutes, and social outcasts of various kinds. That contradiction is sufficient to convince us that a really original and Christ-like mind must have been at work in this place.

Within the abbey, a first impression is of size and splendour and fine materials. The elaborate kitchen gives an idea of the numbers involved in the institution. (One quickly dismisses the thought that it might re-

¹Previous articles in this series appeared in March, June, and October of last year.