

Comment

Some weeks ago, (by chance in the same post), there arrived at the editorial office two press releases from the Catholic Information Office containing advance news and texts of two documents: one, a letter from eight English bishops, (endorsed by a letter from Cardinal Hume to the President of the United States Bishops' Conference), calling on Lord Carrington to help in securing an end to arms supplies by the United States and other western countries to El Salvador; the second, an instruction entitled *Inaestimabile Donum*, concerning certain norms for the Eucharistic Liturgy, from the Sacred Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship.

The letter from the English bishops and the general enthusiasm generated by the Liverpool National Pastoral Congress Reports can only further encourage the feeling that the Catholic Church in Britain really is emerging from torpid self-regard towards a serious engagement of Gospel and World, a creative reflection on the message of Jesus Christ and the serious problems of human living. Such encouragement must not be allowed to be dented by the irritating irrelevance of certain well publicised parts of the Roman document with its (surprise, surprise!) talk of 'concern at the varied and frequent abuses being reported from different parts of the world', 'reprehensible attitudes', 'doctrinal uncertainty, scandal and bewilderment among the people of God' and the strangely enigmatic 'near inevitability of violent reactions'.

It is perfectly true that a feature of current Catholic liturgical practice is that there are some mad and bizarre goings-on; the extremes of the fossilised traditionalism of the Levebvrists and the anarchic lunacy of some of the meaningful mass addicts. The demise of the former is guaranteed by its arthritic atavism, while the latter will surely fade away through its own vacuity. But even should they not fade quickly away, why need the Roman authorities become so fussed about it all? Have they no confidence in the local bishops' authority and ability to judge in their own particular circumstances and in the light of their local church community needs what is appropriate and inappropriate liturgical behaviour? Are the 'abuses', the 'scandal and bewilderment' with their dark concomitant 'near inevitability of violent reactions' so gross and pervasive that the unity of the church is imminently threatened and the local bishops are unable to cope?

Certainly in this country there is no evidence that this is the case, and one suspects that the old battles are once again being fought: unanimity being confused with uniformity; Roman absolutism versus local ecclesial autonomy; rigid rubricism versus theologically sensitive and sensible adaptability. Can we not enjoy the Gospel freedom to see that there can be special circumstances and special occasions, (a group of difficult young people say, or a gathering of house-bound old people), when the celebrating eucharistic group has to decide what is appropriate, and then it isn't rigidly applied rubrics or conformity to arbitrary norms that help

but a sensitive theological tact for the Sacred Liturgy? In this context dare one suggest that the National Pastoral Congress shows a greater theological sensitivity when it calls for Communion under both kinds to become the norm, rather than the wearisome words of the Roman document, "the granting of permission for Communion under both kinds is not to be indiscriminate and the celebrations in question are to be specified precisely; the groups that use this facility are to be clearly defined, well disciplined and homogeneous", (what can that last phrase mean?). There seems little excuse for that kind of backwardness. And there seems little excuse for the clericalist/sexist sentiments of para. 18. "Women are not however permitted to act as altar servers". What bogus theological reasons can be dredged up to justify that? Or is it all to do with fear?

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It is only on rare occasions that we print letters in *New Blackfriars* but the subject matter of the following justifies its publication.

Alban Weston O.P.

Dear Editor,

As many of the readers of *New Blackfriars* will know, Herbert McCabe celebrates the Silver Jubilee of his ordination on 29 September this year. He has passed a quarter of a century in service to the Church and passed it in the best Dominican tradition. It is unnecessary to do more than allude to the series of remarkable comments on topical and relevant moral and theological problems, or to do more than recall the great improvement of the quality of the journal under his editorship. It seems to many of us that his theology, notably that expressed in *Law, Love and Language*, has not yet the full recognition it deserves: as a theologian Herbert, if up to date, is never trendy. Few of us would agree with every word he has written, but it cannot be denied that he has never marketed soothing spirit. If it is the theologian's task to provoke and disturb the complacency into which most of us so easily fall, then Herbert has never been wanting here. In short, a very Dominican career and vocation is being celebrated this year, and one, fittingly, not without its sorrows and its setbacks.

It has therefore seemed to some of us right that the occasion should be marked in some suitable way. Herbert has always been a peripatetic theologian in every sense of the word and we thought it would be a good idea to buy him a small motorcycle to get around the easier, and to express a little of the respect and affection in which we hold him. I have been deputed to act as collector of funds for this purpose and any contribution should be sent to me at the History Department, University, Manchester 13.

Yours etc.
Eric John