

## LITURGY AND THE VERNACULAR.

SINCE, at the beginning of this century, Pius X. called the faithful to the restoring of all things in Christ, and indicated as the chief means of such a restoration the active participation of all in the public worship of the Church, much has been done to bring about what he desired. Popular editions of the Missal have been multiplied, courses and conferences, for priests and lay people, have been organized, and in some ways the effects have not been scanty. Yet, in spite of all this, the priest at the altar and the people in the pew seem often entirely separated, notwithstanding all the efforts of zealous pastors to instruct their people to 'pray the Mass.'

We are only just beginning to realize that much that has been done in the name of the Liturgical Movement has been liturgical only *per accidens*. People have been persuaded to use a Missal, sing plain chant even, but without understanding. They have followed where they were led, blindly. At last some of this is being realised, and more emphasis is being placed now on the fundamentals, the Mystical Body, the dogmatic truths of the Faith, our re-incorporation with Christ, and the living of the life of the Church through the Liturgy.

But this fuller realization of the true implications of the Liturgical Movement has brought its own problems with it. Now that it has at last been understood that the possession of a Missal is not an entirely necessary passport to the gates of Heaven, that the life of the Church is for all and not an *élite*, that it must be possible to live this life, not only if one does not understand Latin, but even if one cannot read, the question of the language of the liturgy becomes obviously of the greatest importance. Some people have even gone so far as to suggest that a course in liturgical Latin should be added to the curriculum of the elementary school.

On the other hand there is a growing demand in certain quarters for a larger place to be given to the vernacular not only in our popular (so-called non-liturgical) services, but even in the liturgy itself. It is asserted that, in this way, we should go far towards solving our problems, and that it is the fact of holding our worship in the obscurity of a dead language which forms the greatest barrier to the active participation of the people in this worship. Before discussing the possibilities of such a solution it is necessary to consider the historical background of the question.

## I.

It must be almost needless to point out that the Roman Liturgy in its primitive form was not Latin at all but Greek. At Rome, as elsewhere in the West, the early Church was a Greek religious colony, the writers Greek, the scriptures Greek, the liturgy Greek. The earliest Christian inscriptions at Rome are in Greek. Tertullian and Minucius Felix, the first Christian Latin writers, belong to the third century.

How the substitution of Latin for Greek came about we do not know; but in any case it cannot be doubted that the liturgy of Rome at first was Greek as were indeed those of Alexandria and Antioch. If any difficulty be felt with regard to the native members of the Church at Rome it may be remembered that Greek, as a language of communication, was far more widely understood among all the subjects of the early Roman Empire than is often realized.

The use of Latin is said to have begun in North Africa, and by the end of the fourth century it was certainly well-established. Traces of Greek persisted, however; at Rome according to the first Roman Ordo (*circa* A.D. 770) the lessons on Holy Saturday are ordered to be sung first in Greek and then in Latin. Nowadays, too, at a Papal Mass, the Epistle and Gospel are chanted in Greek before the Latin version, and everywhere in the Roman rite the *Kyrie eleison* daily and the Trisagion on Good Friday point to the Greek origins of our Liturgy.

In primitive times there was no question of praying in a special (liturgical) language. People naturally said their prayers in the vernacular. But, as in the analogous case of the vestments of the Mass, while popular usage developed, the language of the Church remained fixed. It was not long, therefore, before the liturgical language became a dead language, though for a time it bore great affinity to the vernacular.

Natural as was this development, it had already become part of the generally accepted discipline of the Church by the ninth century. As a consequence St. Cyril and St. Methodius had no little difficulty in obtaining permission from Rome to translate the Byzantine rite into the vernacular of their Slavonic converts. By this time it was generally accepted that the only languages which could be allowed for the public worship of the Church were Hebrew, Latin and Greek—held to be sacred languages because of the inscription on Our Lord's Cross. However, permission was finally obtained in A.D. 880 (Bull of John VIII, *Industriae tuae*) for the Byzantine rite in Slavonic. Since then it has become a liturgical language, for what was the ver-

naricular in the ninth century bears nowadays very much the same relation to the spoken language as does Chaucer's to modern English.

Slavonic was granted originally for the Byzantine rite; but when (11th-12th centuries) some of the inhabitants of Bohemia adopted the Roman Rite they were allowed to keep Slavonic as their liturgical language. Until recently the Roman Rite in Slavonic was confined to certain parishes of what is now Yugoslavia, but in late years this privilege has been extended to any diocese in that country which can show a recognized demand for it.

The peoples of Dalmatia have held tenaciously to their privilege of using the Roman Missal translated into Slavonic. At the present time the position is as follows: the dioceses of Zagreb, Zara, Goriza and Krk use the Roman Missal translated into old Slavonic. A new edition, the first to be printed in Latin characters, was published in Rome in 1927. Pius XI. approved this edition.<sup>1</sup> Thus Church Slavonic is used for Mass in these dioceses and, at least in the diocese of Krk, for the Divine Office also. Priests working in this part of the world have told me that the ordinary members of the congregation understand a considerable amount of Church Slavonic—it is, of course, the parent tongue of their language—more than, for instance, an Italian understands of Church Latin. For the *Rituale* the Holy See has allowed the vernacular (Croatian, Slovenian).<sup>2</sup>

There have been various attempts in the past to obtain permission from Rome for a vernacular liturgy. One such was that of the Jesuit fathers working in China in the early seventeenth century. They had to consider how the Chinese missions could be maintained should the Europeans be banished from the country. They decided that their best course would be to select candidates for the priesthood from among the educated Chinese and so prepare for a native clergy. But to do this it was necessary, they judged, to substitute Chinese for Latin as the language of the liturgy. Without doubt this was a revolutionary proposal, but perhaps the Jesuit mission-

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<sup>1</sup> . . . *predictam editionem approbavit et universo clero lingua Slavonica rite utenti libenter indulsit.* Acta Ap. Sedis, 1927, page 156.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XV, April 17th, 1921. It was owing to a confusion, no doubt, between this concession of the vernacular for the *Rituale*, and old Slavonic for the Mass, that led the Rev. Gerald Donnelly, S.J., to say in *America* (Oct. 15th, 1938, page 43) that the Roman Mass is celebrated in the vernacular among the Croats of Yugoslavia. The Concordat with Yugoslavia, signed but never ratified, contains the following: 'The Holy See is not opposed to the spread of the use of Old Slavonic, and bishops, according to their consciences and prudence, may permit its use in the Mass in Slavonic parishes where this is the unanimous wish of the faithful.'

aries remembered that just such a concession had been made in the case of the Slavs, who, for the sake of their conversion, were granted the use of their own tongue in the celebration of the liturgy.

Paul V. showed himself not unfavourable to the project, and the Congregation of the Inquisition, to which he delegated the question, approved it on March 26th, 1615. The Pope, thereupon, gave permission for the translation of Missal, Breviary, and Ritual into Chinese, the only condition being that the language used should not be the ordinary tongue of the people, but the language of the learned classes, since it would be less liable to change. It is not at all clear why this concession was never used.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand in 1627 Propaganda refused the request of the Discalced Carmelites that they might use the Roman rite in Armenian,<sup>4</sup> and as late as 1896 the same Congregation refused permission for the use of modern Magyar in the Byzantine liturgy of those Ruthenians who had settled in Hungary (the modern diocese of Hagudorogh). In 1912 Greek was imposed in place of Church Slavonic and three years given for the change to be carried out, but for a variety of reasons Greek was never adopted—it proved, indeed, harder for the clergy and people to learn than the Slavonic. Magyar is now used, with the bishop's approval, and in the latest edition of the liturgical books the Greek text is printed in parallel columns with the Magyar.

## II.

A very casual glance at the history of the question seems to establish two facts: firstly, that ordinarily the Holy See has in the past been careful to preserve the principle of the use of a dead language in the liturgy, at least in the Roman rite, and secondly, that this use of a dead language is not a law of divine origin, but that it has grown up in course of time through force of circumstances. It is worth remembering, too, that the Byzantine and other Eastern rites are celebrated, among Catholics, in some twelve languages, and that of these three, Arabic, Magyar, and Rumanian,<sup>5</sup> are the vernacular.

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<sup>3</sup> See Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. xxv, pages 356-8. Some sixty years later Fr. Luigi Buglio, S.J., translated the Breviary (Ji-ko kai-yao) 1674, the Missal (Mi-sa king-tien) 1670, and Ritual (Sheng-sse-li-tien) 1675.

<sup>4</sup> *Petentibus Carmelitis Discalceatis, facultatem celebrandi Missam ritu Romano lingua armena, S.C. censuit eorum petitionem esse rejiciendam* (Coll. S.C. de Prop. Fide I, 11, No. 33).

<sup>5</sup> In Rumania, from the ninth to the seventeenth century, the liturgical language was Slavonic, which was gradually changed to the vernacular Rumanian, printed at first in Slavonic characters, and then in Latin. The Roman alphabet appeared in the beginning of the nineteenth century among the Catholics from whom the Orthodox copied it.

The Council of Trent worded its views on the subject with surprising moderation: *Non expedire visum est patribus ut vulgari passim lingua (Missa) celebraretur* (Sess. 22, cap. 8, can. 9). *Expedire . . . passim* are mild terms if we consider the circumstances of those days, and the insistence of Protestants on a 'language understood of the people.' Protestantism, indeed, has always been the bogey, during the last four hundred years, whenever among Catholics there has been any discussion of the vernacular in liturgy—any such proposal has at once, for this very reason, smacked of heresy. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Jansenism joined with Protestantism as an effectual bar against any unprejudiced discussion of the question. In the nineteenth century the Old Catholics perpetuated the difficulty.

Now in the twentieth century the struggle is against other forces and we are beginning to lose the narrowing counter-reformation spirit, and to discover once again some of our treasures which, never lost of course, were obscured in the heat of theological controversy. In recent years, too, the Holy See has appeared to tolerate, at least, some considerable exceptions to the rule. The case of the Catholics in Yugoslavia and the use of the vernacular in the *Rituale* has already been mentioned. This permission was given in 1921. A year earlier the Concordat between the Holy See and Czechoslovakia permitted the singing of the Epistle and Gospel in the vernacular provided that they were first sung in Latin. The popular language is allowed, too, for the administration of the Sacraments, and also at funerals and in processions (Rogation days, Corpus Christi).

A recent edition of the *Rituale* for the diocese of Cologne shows that a considerable amount of the vernacular has been allowed there in the administration of the Sacraments. An edition of the Ritual for the diocese of Linz, in Austria, gives yet a wider sphere to the vernacular. The diocesan magazine, in announcing this new edition, said: 'No Austrian diocese could heretofore boast of such an extensive use of German in the liturgy. In this matter Rome has without the least difficulty met the wishes of the Clergy halfway.' In this edition of the Ritual the text is arranged with the German and Latin either in parallel columns or with the German below the Latin. The rule is that when the German appears below the Latin the German may be recited after the Latin. Where the two languages are in parallel columns the German may be used without the Latin. German without Latin is allowed, for example, in the administration of Baptism and Extreme Unction except for

the exorcisms, anointings and sacramental forms. The case of the diocese of Hagudorogh, in Hungary, has already been mentioned.

### III.

The twentieth century has seen the beginning of the liturgical movement, and the last decade or so has brought that movement to a very definite parting of the ways. The question that confronts it is whether in the campaign for bringing the public worship of the Church back to the people (and the people back to the public worship of the Church) it shall continue to contend with the liturgy as we now have it and the consequent language difficulty, which, it is asserted, constitutes a serious handicap, or whether it shall work for changes in an endeavour to provide the best instrument for the work in hand.

In Belgium, Austria, France and the U.S.A. in the years immediately preceding this war it seemed that most of those who concerned themselves particularly with the liturgical movement were convinced of the need for a considerable use of the vernacular in the Church's public worship.<sup>6</sup>

Any discussion of this question must obviously take two things for granted. Firstly, that the bringing back of the faithful to corporate public worship is, in itself, a desirable end, and secondly, that at present there is with very few notable exceptions a considerable gulf between the people in church and the priest at the altar.

Would the use of the vernacular bridge that gulf? Surely it would lessen it to a very great degree, and it would certainly prove the end to the very many objections of this kind that are so often offered: 'I cannot learn Latin,' or more simply, 'I don't know any Latin.' For this objection is so often a valid one. It is sometimes said, seriously indeed by those who should know better, that a sufficient knowledge of Latin to understand the Mass is easily gained—that it requires very little Latin and so forth. This is manifestly untrue.

Of course there are objections and very valid ones to the introduction of the popular language into the liturgy. The chief of these is certainly summed up aptly enough in the words of St. Celes-

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<sup>6</sup> Pius Parsech, and *Bibel und Liturgie* in Austria; Dom Paul de Vooght, O.S.B., Louvain; also *Bulletin Paroissial Liturgique* and *La Cité Chrétienne* in Belgium; *Nouvelle Revue théologique* in France; *Orate Fratres* in the U.S.A. It has so often been a reproach of those who do not understand the liturgical movement that it concerns itself with antiquarian, medieval or aesthetic interests, that this insistence on one of the fundamentals is doubly important.

tine I. writing to the bishops of Gaul nearly fifteen hundred years ago: *Obsecrationum sacerdotalium sacramenta respiciamus, quae ab Apostolis tradita in toto mundo atque in omni Ecclesia Catholica uniformiter celebrantur, ut legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi.* Obviously the liturgical language of the Church has become the technical language of the Faith, the belief of the Church is enshrined in her public worship. But the difficulty is not an insuperable one, or we should have no translations at all. It underlines for us, though, the need for that care and precision in translation which nowadays in our popular (translated) devotions is so absent. In this respect it is worth remembering that not so very long ago translations of the ordinary of the Mass were not encouraged, even for private use. As lately as the middle of last century Dom Guéranger could write in the introduction to his well-known *Année Liturgique*: 'Afin de nous conformer aux volontés du Siège Apostolique, nous ne donnons (pas) . . . la traduction litterale de l'Ordinaire et du Canon de la Messe.'

No one is asking for a complete English liturgy, but many would welcome some English in the liturgy. As the late Dom Virgil Michael said some years ago: 'what we want is not the liturgy in the vernacular, but vernacular in the liturgy.'

If it be urged that the living of the Christ-life through the public worship of the Church should be something higher than a merely national expression of such an aim—that the use of English would tend to create a national spirit, whereas, obviously the liturgical movement is the affair of the whole Church, and is, therefore, world-wide in its scope, it must still not be forgotten that the vernacular is already used elsewhere (and in the Roman rite) without, apparently, that particular difficulty. Moreover the Roman rite is not the only rite of Christendom, nor is Latin the only liturgical language. So restricted a universalist outlook makes nothing of those words which we use at Pentecost: *qui per diversitatem linguarum cunctarum gentes in unitate fidei congregasti.*

The question requires careful study, and, need it be said, due submission to authority. In addition what are merely personal preferences and prejudices must go. The liturgical movement, in England especially, has made many mistakes in the past; but it seeks no longer, one hopes, to convert Christians to the liturgy. Rather should the liturgy, with new life, convert and sanctify Christians, and lead them to that living with Christ in his Church which is its life, that re-incorporation with Him which is its end.

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