

LITURGICAL REFORM

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT MONT STE ODILE

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HIGH up in the Vosges, crowning a mountain, stands the sanctuary of Ste Odile. Below there stretches the immense plain of the Lower Rhine, with the spire of Strasbourg Cathedral rising in the middle distance. For thirteen hundred years, amidst all the conflicts that have marked the history of Alsace, it has remained a point of rest. It was here, at the end of October, that there took place the third International Liturgical Conference sponsored by the Liturgical Institute of Trier and the Centre de Pastorale Liturgique of Paris. There could have been no more appropriate meeting-place for a work of reconciliation, for such is the purpose of these gatherings bringing together liturgical scholars and pastoral clergy from ten different countries, all alike concerned to render more effective the redemptive work of Christ which the Liturgy exists to declare and continue.

Previous meetings at Luxembourg and Maria-Laach had evoked the sympathetic interest of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Indeed the text of the restored Paschal Vigil issued in 1950 may be said to be a triumphant vindication of the work of liturgical reform, and that precisely in the direction of the conference's own efforts. For the *Ordo Sabbati Sancti* is not just a piece of liturgical scholarship, designed to restore with archaeological accuracy a rite whose significance had been largely lost. It is all that, but much more is it a bold attempt to make the liturgical action a mystery in which the Christian people *share*. Hence the emphasis on a reduction and a simplification of the symbolism of the rite, so that the central theme of death and resurrection, darkness and light, may stand revealed in all its strength. Hence, too, the provision that the congregation should at this point of the Christian mystery, and in their own language, renew the baptismal vows which the Paschal rite enshrines.

The principles of liturgical reform which the new Paschal

Vigil so notably exemplifies cannot be limited to a single rite, however fundamental it may be. The Mont Ste Odile conference took, therefore, for its subject 'Modern Man and the Mass', and considered the obstacles in the existing Liturgy which make a true participation in it more difficult than it need be. And here it must be emphasised that the liturgical rites have never, in the economy of the Church's life, been considered as untouchable ancient monuments. There are, of course, elements in the sacraments that cannot change, and it is the Church's magisterium which defines what precisely these must be for the valid administration of the rite. But the complex structure of word and gesture in which the rites are in practice transmitted may well need to be modified so that they may more effectively achieve their purpose.

Thus there is a twofold approach to the work of reform: that of liturgical scholarship, with its exact analysis of the history of the sacred rites and its concern to see that modifications should be in the line of the Church's tradition, and that of the pastoral mission of priests anxious to give to the liturgical mystery its fullest efficacy in the often unfavourable climate of our own time. Both alike submit without reserve to the Church's sole competence to judge what shall be done. At Mont Ste Odile the presence of the Bishops of Strasbourg, Metz, Nancy and Mainz, was itself a symbol of the conference's Catholic unity, and though as yet it cannot claim to be truly international (the French and German representation was predominant, and America was not represented at all), it is hoped that future meetings will extend the range of participation and hence the usefulness of its work. It must be frankly admitted that the liturgical awakening of recent years in France and Germany has made its liturgical apostles too little aware of the very different state of opinion in other countries. For liturgical reform, like any other, must take into account the multiple factors of history, tradition and education, which so profoundly affect man's attitude to change.

The conference began with a paper on 'The problem of the liturgical symbols of the Mass', by Father Donœur, the French Jesuit who has done so much to vivify the

religious, and in particular the liturgical, life of young people in France. He insisted that Catholic symbolism should be *pedagogical*, an authentic revealing of a mystery through signs and not an artificial, and sometimes fanciful, application of secondary ideas to the radical mystery of redemption and man's incorporation in Christ. Many of the symbols of the Mass have indeed become hard to discern under the superstructure of late accretions. Do thin little wafers at once indicate *bread*, the stuff we need for daily living? And is a remote low Mass at an altar that looks not at all like a table a sign of a *meal* in which the Christian people are invited to join? We know the answer, but the problem remains, which is to enable the sacramental sign to have its fullest impact on men and women who are little equipped to see beyond their immediate situation. The Christian symbol is a constructive and creative reality, and all that needlessly hinders its revealing work should be eliminated not simply for reasons of good taste, but because the sign if obscured may cease to evoke the tremendous reality it is designed to declare.

'The obstacles that exist between modern man and the Mass' was the subject dealt with by the Abbé Daniel, a priest of the Mission de Paris and thus well equipped to speak of the problem of presenting the Christian mysteries to a pagan proletariat. The Latin language can be an obstacle: the solutions so far attempted are either artificial (the 'doubling' of Latin and the vernacular by means of a lector) or break up the community (e.g., the use of missals, which only means everyone saying their own prayers in a 'liturgical' way). None of the obstacles is essential to the Mass as the sacrifice of Christ and the Church, but the central problem is to present the Christian mystery to a world structurally becoming increasingly unwilling to receive it.

A priest from the Soviet Zone of Germany gave, as a postscript to the Abbé Daniel's paper, a moving account of his twenty years' experience in building up a Catholic parish in a town in which Catholics are only three per cent of the population. During all the trials of these years the sense of a living Christian community had grown ever more powerful. That this was perhaps easier to achieve in Ger-

many than in other countries appeared from an account of the *Deutsche Hochamt* (the 'German High Mass') given by Professor Balthasar Fischer of Trier. This form of the Mass, widespread though Germany and recognised by Rome as customary in most German dioceses, implies that the celebrant performs his part in Latin while the congregation sing their part (both the Proper and the Ordinary) in German. Sometimes the German is in fact a paraphrase of the liturgical texts, but increasingly efforts are being made to standardise a 'German Gregorian chant' which will be an exact translation of the Latin text read by the priest.

The discussion that concluded the first day's session, while recognising the validity of much that had been said (with great frankness) by the speakers, turned on the need for absolute fidelity to Catholic tradition and on the immediate task of using to the full all—and that is a great deal—which is permitted by existing ecclesiastical discipline. It is legitimate for liturgical scholars, and indeed the Congregation of Rites encourages them, to suggest possible modification, but in the meantime there is an urgent work to be done here and now to vivify the liturgical life of the Church as we know it.

The more technical work of the Congress was concerned with possible modifications in the rites of the Communion of the Mass. Dom Capelle, Abbot of Mont César, read a paper on the rites preparatory to Communion (from the 'Little Elevation' of the Canon to the Kiss of Peace). His suggestions, based on an exact analysis of the history of the Canon and its earliest forms, were designed to render the rite not merely 'accurate', in the sense of being more in conformity with the best liturgical tradition, but, too, more available for the intelligent participation of the faithful. This important principle, which lies behind the structure of the restored Paschal Vigil (which in so many respects provides the point of departure for all future liturgical reform), was invoked, too, by Professor Jungmann of Innsbruck, author of *Missarum Solemnia*, in his paper on the rites of the Communion. Such suggestions, therefore, as the singing aloud of the doxology of the Canon (*per Ipsum*, etc.), the use of part of the host consecrated by the celebrant

for the communion of the ministers, the restoration of the true function of the Communion antiphon (with its accompanying psalm) as the festal song of the faithful as they approach the altar, are rooted in the most authentic liturgical tradition and have, besides, importance in stressing an intelligent and intelligible participation.

'The Word of God in the Mass' was the subject of the third day's proceedings. A communication from Dr Kahlefeld of Munich suggested a wider selection of scriptural readings at Mass (perhaps spread over a three-year cycle), so that the biblical roots of the Liturgy might have their fullest strength. Père Féret, o.p., in a paper of the greatest importance, was concerned not with possible modifications but with the immediate need of recovering the sense of the Bible as the creative Word of God. This is integral to a pastoral liturgy, for the biblical fact is above all efficacious in the eucharistic mystery which re-presents the sacrifice of Christ who *is* the Word of God. The fundamental character of the Liturgy, and especially of the Eucharist, is that it is a faithful declaring of this Word, and that through an orchestration of word and gesture, of text and rite, which together make available the Christian mystery in all its fullness. So it is that the Word of God utters the whole economy of salvation, and in the Mass its true dimensions are revealed.

Reports on the forms of participation in the Mass found in various countries showed how profoundly history and national tradition can modify the practice of religion, so that a situation which has become normal in Germany may well seem a strange innovation in Brazil. As the Pope has emphasised in *Mediator Dei*, there is room for a wide diversity, and a true liturgical spirit will always avoid a pedantic application of a single solution to a problem which has its roots in a human situation which must greatly vary from country to country. Nevertheless the ideal of the Church's practice is plain, and the principal value of such gatherings as that at Mont Ste Odile must be the sharing of experience to hasten the day when once more the faithful people of God may enter fully into the liturgical mystery which exists precisely for their sanctification and their incorporation in Christ.