

irresistibly singable (the people repeating exactly the words and music of the cantor): what a pity the rest of the work does not live up to this promise! The recurring 'theme tune of some grandeur' is really too trite, and fits none of the texts without violence, excepting 'Alleluia' and 'Amen'.

Likewise familiar are the two songs recorded by Père Duval during his recent visit. Charming, if rather anaemic, they do yet represent a first step towards a type of song which is both truly popular and not too transiently contemporary. For we must beware of aiming at a sort of ecclesiastical 'Top Ten'—an ever-changing succession of commercial hits whose popularity wanes as soon as it is proclaimed. But to recognize this danger is not to deny the desirability of forming a virile body of popular religious songs, whose vigour may delight the young without shocking the old, and whose good taste, while not being so refined as to preclude the affection of the public, may yet not be so wanting as to disgust the sensitive.

We need not consider too much the queasiness of the kinsfolk of Michol who, seeing David the King leaping and dancing before the Lord, despised him in her heart. Rather should we aim at bringing all that is good in the art of music under the yoke of Christ, so that as many as possible may sing with joy and conviction the praises of the Most High.

For 'he who sings well prays twice'.



THE SENSE OF MYSTERY

P.M.

THERE are many people today who condemn the efforts that are being made to make the liturgy more intelligible. The Mass and the Sacraments, they say, are mysteries; it is only right that they should be unintelligible. All this concentration on the instructive power of the liturgy is a false emphasis; the ceremonies of the liturgy are not meant to teach, they are meant to convey a feeling of reverential awe for the great mysteries of our salvation which are beyond the power of our

understanding. Why this desire to have everything pat and plain, to hear and understand all the words of the Mass? The Church uses mysterious rites and a language that is not easily understood because the liturgy expresses mysteries that cannot be understood. A hundred years ago as great a scholar as Dom Guéranger could write: 'The Church . . . proclaims her victorious and immutable doctrine in the language of the people who hear her; but her mission is not only to instruct this people. If she reveals to them the divine truths it is in order to unite them to God by the mysteries of the altar; after she has explained her faith she puts them in communication with God through love. When she has produced in them the desire of the infinite good, in whose presence there is no longer wise man nor ignorant, like Moses she ascends the mount and her voice ceases to be audible to the ears in order that it may ring in the hearts. Only the accents of a mysterious language echo in the sacred assembly and transport the thought beyond the present. Even those who know this language are warned that something extraordinary is being accomplished; soon the words of this sacred language are lost in the bosom of a silence in which God alone hears, but the symbolic ceremonies always continue and by their visible forms do not cease to elevate the holy people to the love of invisible things.'¹ A similar argument appeared in these pages last year: '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. . . . 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.'²

This argument rests on a misunderstanding of the word *Mystery* as applied to the sacramental system. When the Fathers of the Church use the word *mysterium* in this context they mean to convey something far removed from the meaning we usually give to the word. The *Mysterium par excellence* is the mystery of our redemption. St Paul writes: 'Great indeed is the mystery of our religion.

¹ *Institutions Liturgiques*, vol. III, p. 84.

² Conrad Pepler, O.P., 'Latin is Still Practical': *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, June 1957, p. 566.

He was manifested in the flesh,
 Vindicated in the spirit,
 Seen by angels,
 Preached among the nations,
 Believed on in the world,
 Taken up into glory.³

The *mysterium fidei* is the secret of God's saving plan as revealed, personified, in the Word incarnate. Later the term was applied to this same salvific plan manifested in material things, truly present and rendered effective through the sacramental system, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Just as it was through the Son made flesh for all to see that the unknowable Father is revealed to us, so it is through the palpable things of our world which we can understand that his inscrutable purpose takes effect in our souls. Thus in patristic theology the word *Mysterium* takes on a technical meaning. It comes to signify the mystery of redemption as applied to the soul by sacred actions and words, which, by their symbolic character, convey to the participants an understanding of the supernatural reality which has come about. The word has for them a much wider signification than the word sacrament as we use it, and is applied to the whole sphere of liturgical action embracing both sacraments and sacramentals. It is through these that we are taken up into the great mystery. The very purpose of all the actions and words of the rites is to convey to our dull understanding a sense, that is a knowledge, of this mystery; but they can only do so for the man who has faith. The ritual, then, is not there to baffle, to puzzle or to overawe, but to instruct, and this in a way of which it alone is capable.

It is the Mass, in which the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God is made present, that is the centre of the mystery and most properly the *mysterium fidei*; from this all the other sacraments flow. St Augustine describes it with beautiful succinctness when he says: 'Thus he is both the priest, for it is he that offers, and the victim that is offered. It is of this reality that he wished the Church's sacrifice to be a daily sacrament, in order that since she is the body of which he is the head she might learn through him to offer herself.'⁴ If the sacrifice of Christ is present upon our altars, it is in order that we may learn and be enabled to unite

³ II Tim. 3, 16.

⁴ *De Civ. Dei* X, 20.

ourselves with that sacrifice. We cannot in this world understand fully the mystery of the sacrifice of the whole Christ, head and members, but it is essential that we should understand as much as we can; the sacred actions, words and elements, by which the mystery is made present, are designed precisely to enable us to do so. St Paul says: 'The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf we who are many are one body for we all partake of the same loaf.'⁵ St Cyprian, developing this, says: 'By the sacrament itself our people are shown as united, in order that we might know that just as many grains gathered together, crushed and mixed, form one loaf, so we are one body in Christ who is the bread of heaven.'⁶ It is in order to restore to this symbolism some of its pristine strength that the Pope in *Mediator Dei* urges that wherever possible the people should communicate with bread consecrated at the same Mass,⁷ and has now made this compulsory on Holy Thursday and at the Easter Vigil.

The mystery of the Mass, then, is the union in sacrifice of Christ and his Church, but if the faithful are to receive the full benefit from this mystery they must have the right dispositions. A careful study of the Mass liturgy shows that it is designed not only to instruct but also to help them to these dispositions as a sacramental. As the grains of wheat growing on the hillside are gathered together to make one loaf, so the many individuals living their separate lives in the world must be gathered together and formed into an ecclesia, a chosen congregation, a holy people, a kingly priesthood.⁸ All the first part of the Mass is directed to this end. Sprinkled with holy water in memory of their baptism, they beg God's mercy on their sins in the Kyrie; by praying together with one voice, listening to lessons from the scripture and the homily which expounds them, they are prepared to offer the sacrifice. The ancient rite of the offertory procession, in which they offered bread and wine for the sacrifice, was again ordained to deepen their understanding of the mystery. When all is prepared the celebrating priest orders them to raise up their hearts while, in their name, he gives thanks to God and offers to him the sacrifice of his Son. For many centuries the people were

⁵ I Cor. 10, 16.

⁶ *Epis.* 63, 13. P.L. 4, 384B.

⁷ C.T.S. translation no. 128.

⁸ c.f. I Peter 2, 9; quoting Ex. 19, 6.

able to listen to this great prayer and to unite themselves with the priest as they heard him say 'accept this sacrifice which we offer' and 'remember your servants . . . and all those standing here whose faith and devotion are known to you, who offer to you this sacrifice of praise'.⁹ Following him as he pronounced the words of consecration they were led to the heart of the mystery and brought to offer themselves a pure sacrifice to God in union with Christ their head. At the end of the great prayer the congregation signed its approval with an Amen, and, when they had exchanged the kiss of peace, the union of head and members in sacrifice was consummated in the reception of communion.

In this way the liturgy performed its function, but it could do so only because the actions and words were intelligible. In the course of the centuries the liturgy has become overlaid with so much ceremony and extraneous symbolism that the meaning of the rites has been obscured. The purpose of reform is to restore this intelligibility, as is already plain from the restored rite of Holy Week. In so doing, the Church is once more enabling the people more easily to understand and appreciate the mystery in which they are involved. But it is not enough that the actions alone should be intelligible; since the liturgy depends primarily on the use of words, these too must be understood if they are to perform their function. It may be objected that the words of the prayers, especially of the canon, are not for the sake of the people but directed to God alone. Again, however, to say this shows a misunderstanding of the nature of vocal prayer. St Thomas teaches that 'to God we use words, not in order to manifest our concepts to him, who searches the heart, but in order to excite reverence for him in ourselves and those who hear us'.¹⁰ In saying this he is only following the teaching of St Paul who says: 'If I use a strange tongue when I offer prayer, my spirit is praying but my mind reaps no advantage from it. . . . If thou dost pronounce a blessing in this spiritual manner how can one who takes his place among the uninstructed say Amen to thy thanksgiving? He cannot tell what thou art saying. Thou, true enough, art duly giving thanks but the other's faith is not strengthened.'¹¹ It is

⁹ Roman Canon. It was not till the end of the eighth century that Alcuin thought it wiser to change this phrase to 'pro quibus tibi offerimus vel qui tibi offerunt', etc.

¹⁰ S. T. II-II, 91, 1.

¹¹ I Cor. 14, 14-16. St Paul is speaking not of a foreign language but of a charismatic babbling; his arguments apply here none the less.

interesting to note that at the time when Greek, which was the liturgical language, had ceased to be intelligible to most Christians in Italy, Ambrosiaster commenting on this text says: 'It is obvious that our minds remain in ignorance if a language is spoken which we do not know; just as Latins who sing in Greek are delighted by the sound of the words but do not know what they say. . . . What fruit can they have who do not understand what is said?'¹² (Indeed, so obvious did this seem to the Church in Italy in the fourth century that the change from Greek to Latin aroused little remark and we have difficulty in finding out just when it happened.) All the public prayers of the liturgy, just as much as the actions, are directed to the instruction and edification of the congregation; they are designed to produce in them the dispositions necessary for a fruitful participation in the mystery. If they are not understood they cannot achieve this.

We must, however, be on our guard lest these arguments lead us into error. The essence of the Mass does not consist in the instruction or even the participation of the faithful; it is the sacrifice of Christ made present on our altars by the power of God, through the sacramental rites, *ex opere operato*. Because the Protestants of the sixteenth century denied the sacrificial character of the Mass and considered it as just a memorial, they argued that it was essential that the congregation hear and understand all that is said and done. This error has been condemned by the Council of Trent: 'If any shall say that the rite of the Roman Church, according to which part of the canon and the words of consecration are pronounced silently, is to be condemned, or that the Mass must only be celebrated in the vernacular, let him be anathema.'¹³ The ceremonies and words of the liturgy, as has been said, were designed to facilitate the participation of the congregation, but they are only means. Because they are a means and not the essential, the Church has full power to arrange and change them as she judges best for different countries and from age to age. The question of the use of the vernacular is of extreme complexity and involves many more considerations than the nature and purpose of the liturgical ceremonies. And, after all, is it impossible to understand anything that is not in the vernacu-

¹² P.L. 17, 255, B.

¹³ Session xxii, canon ix, D.B. 956. For a lucid statement of the teaching of the Council on this matter see J. McDonald: 'Theology and language in the liturgy', in *English in the Liturgy*, ed. R. A. Cunliffe.

lar? Surely in this age of universal education we can teach our children to understand at least those parts of the Mass which remain always the same. The Pope has told us: 'The Church has grave reasons for firmly maintaining within the Latin rite the unconditional obligation of the celebrating priest to use the Latin language.'¹⁴ We can, however, be quite sure that he has no desire that the prayers of the liturgy be unintelligible.

The attitude that the mysteries must be hidden away has recurred often in the history of the liturgy. The early Church was very careful to keep them a secret from all unbelievers and even catechumens, but no one suggested that they should be hidden from the faithful themselves, for they remembered our Lord saying: 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to the rest in parables, that seeing they shall not see and hearing they shall not understand.'¹⁵ But later in the Church's history there came men who were so taken up by the wonder and holy fear which should always be our attitude in the face of such mysteries that, forgetting that the function of the liturgical ceremonies is to render intelligible by symbols the mysteries they enshrine, they wished to create an atmosphere of the occult, and obscured the meaning of the rites. It was this desire that in the ninth century caused the bishops of Gaul to have the canon of the Mass recited silently, considering it too holy to be sung aloud for all the church to hear. This practice they managed later to introduced into Rome itself. Again it was the same desire that, in the middle ages, caused the sanctuary to be screened off from the congregation by a solid stone wall. In this way the congregation of the faithful, which an earlier age considered as a holy people, a royal priesthood, were now considered unworthy to look upon the solemn celebration of the liturgy which must be reserved to clerics. Though they may not realize it, it is again this same desire that now leads men to say: '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.'¹⁶

I have no wish to minimize the importance of the sense of

¹⁴ *Allocution to the Liturgical Congress of Assisi*, A.A.S. 1956, p. 724. c.f. *Mediator Dei*, no. 64. (Eng. trans.)

¹⁵ Luke 8, 10. c.f. Ambrosiaster, ubi sup. 256D-257A.

¹⁶ Conrad Pepler, o.p., *ibid.*

wonder and awe that we must all feel before God's mysteries. It is all important, for, when we lose it, what could be a fruitful participation becomes a humdrum routine. The question is: how can the sense of mystery be most effectively communicated? Is it by rood screens, by an illogical and incomprehensible welter of ceremony, by a religious silence, and what our forefathers were proud to call the sacred mumbling of the Mass? or by letting the liturgy express those inscrutable truths that can only be expressed through its actions and words? There is indeed a veil, though it falls not between the altar and congregation of our man-made churches, but between our altars and that holy of holies that is above, into which our High Priest has entered once for all, and, seated at the right hand of the Father, offers himself an eternal victim.¹⁷ On this side of the veil it is given to us to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but 'in a dark manner' through symbols and sacraments which reflect those truths that we shall see face to face when we too pass beyond the veil.

¹⁷ cf. Hebrews 9, 1-10, 18.



REVIEWS

WORLD CRISIS AND THE CATHOLIC. (Sheed and Ward; 12s. 6d.)

World Crisis and the Catholic is a collection of twenty essays of varying length and quality and one short, but impressive, poem by Gertrud von le Fort. The occasion for the publication of this work was the Second World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in Rome. The book is well produced and printed.

World Crisis and the Catholic epitomizes the weakness of this kind of symposium. About half the contributions are of small value, just worth including in a magazine, perhaps, but certainly not of the quality to warrant inclusion in a book. If only the editor had been more critical in sifting his material, as opposed to asking famous Catholics to write articles on specified topics and then accepting these articles, the book would have been a very valuable one; it would have been about half the size of the present work and, being less expensive, might well have had a larger sale.

Karl Stern, author of that fascinating autobiography *The Pillar of Fire*, makes some wise remarks in 'Group Psychology in the Atomic