

The principal new features in the legislation of this encyclical are (1) the regulation of non-liturgical 'religious music' and in particular of vernacular hymns, with the permission of them at Low Mass; (2) the permission to use strings in church; and (3) the formal admission of women 'to sing at solemn Mass the liturgical texts' under certain conditions.

How these points are affecting current practice in this country since Christmas 1955 is not perhaps yet evident. One has seen an ingenious device of a surpliced choir of men in the stalls, and behind them, in a recess behind the stalls, the lady soprani and contralti, not in surplices and 'altogether separated'. How the 'mixed choirs' in the west gallery are faring one cannot say. I did myself once get the bishop's permission to accompany a four-part choir of boys with the double-bass alone, doubling with 16-ft tone the bass line, and this was very effective. I kept the letter, but shall now need it no longer. With regard to vernacular hymns the Pope recommends (n. 51) the compilation of hymnals by episcopal authority, and English Catholics may feel proud that they did this long ago.

The Society of St Gregory, whose biggest work perhaps in its early days was the sponsoring of *Plainsong for Schools* for the propagation of good Plainsong, are once more to be congratulated on publishing this encyclical in association with Challoner Publications in graceful format with a few useful notes and references.



LET THE PEOPLE SING¹

A Parish Priest's thoughts on Pastoral Liturgy

J. C. BUCKLEY

LET THEM? . . . If only they would! But let us not blame them. What have we priests done about it? Not that I think that everything is solved by lusty singing in church. Far from it! It is the whole picture of the people's part in the liturgy that we must keep constantly before our minds. Our first task is surely with the theological basis of the liturgical movement.

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It will be seen for what it is, a *pastoral* movement, when and only when its underlying theology has been studied especially in the light of the doctrine of the Mystical Body. This threefold movement of thought (theology of the Mystical Body), action (the Mystical Body at work in the lay apostolate) and liturgy (the Mystical Body at prayer) is a twentieth-century phenomenon only in so far as it is an organized movement. The priest in the parish has to become conscious of this and relate his seminary training to the needs of those members of Christ's Body whom he has the privilege to serve. I am quite convinced that when the liturgical movement is *recognized* by priests as a pastoral movement it will be given the attention it deserves. We must acknowledge that, at times, it has been ill-served by the aesthetes who have made it appear to some to be a matter of neums and apparels and rood-screens. Plainsong has often been made to appear difficult and precious. To most congregations a vast amount of plainchant is distasteful and impossible of execution. Let us face the fact that we are seriously hampered in this country by the lack of simple, dignified tunes for the Ordinary of the Mass. Thank God for Gregory Murray's *People's Mass*! For many a congregation it has been the beginning of a real awakening to the splendour of their part in the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries. For many a priest it has been a welcome proof that, given a simple means of doing so, a congregation can and will sing the Ordinary of the Mass. Two sessions in the pulpit have been sufficient in two very different parishes for teaching the people this simple method of singing.

Teaching the people to take their part and teaching them why they should do so have, in my experience, to be done together. While insisting that the ordained priest alone has the '*proprie vereque dicenda potestas sacrificandi*', the Holy Father has a great deal to say (*Mediator Dei*) about the priesthood of the laity which is exercised with and through that of the sacrificing priest properly so called. We cannot in conscience allow our people to remain in ignorance of these matters. We have to show them and keep on showing them their great dignity as Christians. I say *show*, not just *tell*. The liturgy, correctly understood and celebrated, will help us to do this. '*The sacred liturgy is the public worship which our redeemer, the Head of the Church, renders to the heavenly Father, and which the society of Christ's faithful renders to its*

founder, and through him, to the eternal Father' (Mediator Dei). We simply must find time for this very important work: 'sacerdotem oportet praeesse . . .'. We must *lead* our people in prayer, not only during the actual celebration of the Sacred Mysteries but in preparing them. On us priests will depend to a great extent the training of the choir. Not that we need be musicians, but we must try to know and understand the type of music which is most suitable to liturgical worship. We shall have to give to the choir an appreciation of its rôle, not allowing it to usurp the part of the congregation. The choir will, under our guidance, learn to lead the latter at times. We shall probably find that the best position for this is not an organ loft. A Lady Chapel or transept can be very useful for the purpose of encouraging singing from the body of the church. The choir, too, must be given encouragement by the priest who will help them to appreciate the Feasts and Seasons as well as the meaning of the sacred text they sing. The organist and choirmaster will easily understand our interest and will not regard it as interference. It is only when the rôle of the choir has been misunderstood that any difficulty has been experienced in this direction.

When and how is the congregation to be taught to sing the Mass so that, to quote Pius XI (*Divini Cultus*), 'there will no longer be any need to lament the sad spectacle in which the people do not respond at all, or only in a subdued and indistinct murmur'? Well over half a century has passed since St Pius X wrote the words that are writ large in the heart of the true liturgist: '*The primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit is the active participation of the faithful in the holy Mysteries and in the public and solemn prayers of the Church*'. Twenty-five years later Pius XI was appealing to the faithful not to remain as 'dumb spectators' but to let their voices alternate with those of the priest and the choir. Fortunately more and more children are leaving school with a working acquaintance with at least one set of Mass tunes. But many years will have passed before all our congregation has learnt to sing the Mass unless we do something about it. It has been found that the best (and in many cases the only) way of teaching the congregation is during sermon time in the evening or even during Mass. There is a way of doing this which will appeal to the people and which will instruct them not only in the singing but in the meaning of

their part in the liturgy. It can be an illustrated sermon rather than a chant-class and as such is not out of place at the times mentioned. If the priest can demonstrate the singing himself, so much the better. But we are not all blessed with the means of doing so. We need the choir and organist to help us, and whether we think the people can read music or not we must put the text in their hands. Demand that they show themselves willing by holding the text. It is surprising how many people are at first unwilling to do even that. I have found it a good idea to leave an appropriate number of them at the end of the pew. The little gesture of those at the end of the benches who must pick up the copies and pass them to their neighbours helps to clear the decks for action and to establish contact among the participants. Now we teach them to read the *Kyrie* and show them what a beautiful prayer to the Blessed Trinity it is. We might explain the origin of the Greek words and how this prayer found a place in the Mass. Dom Gregory's *Kyrie* can be learnt by them in two minutes. After the *Kyrie* it is as well to pass to the responses. Refuse to accept mere murmuring, but do not object to a *basso profundo* rendering which insists on singing everything an octave lower than anything you consider well within the range of the average human voice. An explanation of the responses, their function and meaning will probably bring you as far as you can expect to go in the first session. The following week's instruction can be devoted to the *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei*, leaving the *Gloria* for the third and last instruction. There is usually no need to teach the *Credo* as nearly everyone knows it already. Of course, the work is not finished then. It may require many weeks and months of encouragement, explanation and revision before the congregation settles down. If the priest believes in the value of the task he will not lack the courage to push forward in the face of criticism and disappointment. Criticism there will be. Whatever the priest tries to do in this way will meet with the taunts of the ignorant and of the 'what-was-good-enough-for-my-grandmother-is-good-enough-for-me' school. There will be those, of course, who will want to contract out, who wish to 'follow' in their missals *undisturbed*. A good deal of instruction on the idea of community worship and of the idea of the community itself will have to accompany our attempts to break down prejudice and what might be termed 'liturgical snobbery'.

Training in gesture as well as vocal participation should be the concern of the priest. A few people will object to 'bobbing up and down' because they have been accustomed for years to get on with their own private devotions against the background of the Mass. It is very important to let people know the meaning of gesture. The value of standing, sitting and kneeling at the correct times will be seen by them if we take care to explain these things. The posture of sitting for instruction and for watching (during the Offertory), the standing position for the Gospel, for congregational singing, for the Collects, Post-Communion, Preface and so on, can help a great deal with the understanding of the liturgy. How can we expect people to appreciate the beauty of the Preface if they are not encouraged to stand boldly and reply to the priest's invitation to lift up their hearts? It all helps to bring the people together and along with the priest. They are less detached and the gap between the nave and the sanctuary can be considerably narrowed in this way.

Most of what has been said so far refers to the 'ideal celebration', which is High Mass. But three-quarters of our people never assist at High Mass (even in its less solemn form). Are they to be left without liturgical training? Here we run into the difficulty of trying to find methods of participation which are in accord with the mind and authority of the Church. We are forced to admit that the liturgy (regarded as ceremonial) is not now ideally fitted to the participation of the faithful. Dialogue Mass is a step in the right direction and the Holy Father has certainly shown that he no longer regards it as being as outlandishly stuntish as some would have made it appear a few years ago. In fact his encyclical on the Liturgy is full of praise for this and similar methods provided the bishop's authority has shown approval in his own diocese. Thank God that in many dioceses in England the Dialogue Mass has brought an understanding of the liturgical movement to thousands who never see a High Mass.

We all need a great deal more help with music for Masses at which considerable numbers of children are present. But again we can use our imagination a good deal. A certain amount of commentary will probably be useful for a time, although none of us would like to see the actual celebration used as an object-lesson. Children can be taught easily to use Fr Howell's *Mass Prayers*. I have known a congregation of children and adults led

in these prayers by a boy of nine or ten. Each part of the Mass has a simple paraphrase of the Missal text and is numbered and punctuated with breath-stops. The leader merely says the number and all the children join in the prayer. Small altar-servers or any group of children can easily be taught to speak as a choir a simple vernacular arrangement of the Proper. I had the privilege of arranging a broadcast children's Mass a short time ago and found that the singing of some of the Gelineau Psalms fitted the occasion admirably. The children love these psalms and they can learn them very quickly. Even the antiphons alone can be used judiciously to bring the children into the picture. What must be sedulously avoided is, of course, the kind of activity and singing which distracts rather than helps children's understanding of and participation in the Mass. I hope it will not be thought that I am making a plea for Children's Masses in Parishes. I am merely thinking of those occasions (school-time Mass, First Communions, Retreats, etc.) when one is catering particularly for children.

The altar, of course, must be the centre and goal of our efforts and our parishes must be built around it. We have to see that the altar itself is suitably adorned. Suitably, that is, for the purpose which it serves: an altar of sacrifice and a banqueting table. Our people will learn to see it as a symbol of Christ the Head of the Mystical Body. The use of frontals will help them to see the altar in this light for they will understand that the very colours of these cloths and vestments indicate the mood of the Church united with her Head. The Altar Society, the women's guilds, the Children of Mary, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and all the other societies will have a part to play in keeping the church and linen clean, in repairing, sewing and vestment-making. The average needlewoman can learn to make vestments quite simply and our aim should be, I feel, as far as possible to get our own parishioners to make such practical contributions to their parish church.

The parish as a community has fallen on hard times, but the liturgical movement as well as the lay apostolate can do much to restore it to its rightful place. It must be made to appear what it is in reality: the Mystical Body of Christ in miniature. There is a grave danger in modern money-raising methods that the people may be led to the conclusion that their comparatively small contributions to the Offertory are of little value. We need to

restore the idea of the Offertory as a religious act. It is possible to do this with considerable gain in time, energy and even money, provided our people learn to see that their contributions are of immense value if given and viewed in the right way. Their money is the fruit of their labour and of their saving. They can and should be asked to budget for their spiritual home with as much care as they budget for their temporal home. They can learn to make of their offering an act of religion before they leave their homes. Fumbling for an odd coin and tossing it to a beggar is scarcely a Christian way of helping the poor. What is one to say of such a method when it is used at Mass for fulfilling a duty of justice to God and his Church? It is not just a collection of alms, it is the Offertory which counts. Can we not show them that their work and their homes are joined to Christ's sacrifice by their Offertory which should symbolize the offering of themselves? A system of envelopes can help. Every adult is asked to place his or her offering into the little envelope *before* leaving home and while doing so to say a little prayer such as this one which has been taken from a Secret:

Let our gifts be offered up to thee, Lord, who hast given them to us, in order that we may use them for the glory of thy Name.

Second collections, outdoor collections (except those ordered by authority) can be cut out and the net result will be found to be very encouraging. And how orderly and quiet the Offertory becomes! No more chink of coins, no more delay while the fumbling and counting go on, but an act of religion which is given more point still when the offerings are brought on to the sanctuary and placed beside the altar of Christ's sacrifice. There will rarely be need to mention money from the pulpit once the people have seen the value of their offerings. With such an approach to the matter they cannot afford to be ungenerous.

Next in importance to the altar is the baptismal font. Yet how often do we see it surrounded with chairs and odd bits of furniture! Hats, pamphlets, prayer-books and odd bits of left-off clothing are sometimes to be seen on it. It is not just thoughtlessness, it is more often a lack of appreciation of baptism itself which is to blame. Let the font share something of the Easter adornment. It is simple to have a silk cover made for it. A few spring flowers and some candles can help to impress on the congregation the dignity of the 'womb of Holy Mother Church'. The font-cover

can be put on at other times with useful effect: at Whitsun, on the occasion of First Communion, Confirmation, etc., just to remind us of where it all began. But this is leading to other matters for which there is no space. The Mass and the Altar have been the main theme. The Sacraments, too, must be 'revealed' to the faithful and, as priests, we shall take to heart the instruction of our Holy Father in *Mediator Dei*:

That the Christian people may continue to acquire more and more supernatural riches, see that they are instructed concerning the treasures of the liturgy by sermons, dissertations, periodical courses and weeks devoted to the study of the liturgy.



CONGREGATIONAL MUSIC

MICHAEL DURAND

IT is most important that when the faithful assist at the sacred ceremonies . . . they should not be merely detached and silent spectators, but, filled with a deep sense of the beauty of the liturgy, they should sing alternately with the clergy or the choir, as it is prescribed.'

(Pius XI. *Divini Cultus*, §9.)

Music, to be suitable for congregational use, must clearly possess certain distinguishing qualities, which it will be wise to try and define at the outset. Firstly it must be simple. Even in parishes where no prejudice against congregational singing exists to be overcome, it is necessary both to avoid the discouragement caused by attempting music too elaborate melodically, too complex rhythmically, or of too great vocal compass; and to avoid, even worse, complacency in the unworthy performance of too difficult works. Secondly, it should be sufficiently appreciable in terms of current musical idioms to embody the virtues of popularity. The difficulties which this entails in a disintegrated assortment of musical cultures such as we know today, as well as the problem of profane association, will be discussed later in the article. Suffice to describe popularity here as a certain spontaneous