

Comment

A not unpleasant feeling of Voltairean righteousness suffuses those liberals who defend to the death Marcel Lefebvre and the others who insist on celebrating what they believe to be the Tridentine Mass. Faithful readers of these pages will know that we have always condemned as a piece of petty and heartless authoritarianism the absolute ban on the old-fashioned way of celebrating Mass. It did not show much faith in the attractiveness of the *Missa Normativa* to suppose that it would not 'catch on' unless its rivals were forcibly suppressed. (I use the plural because the old Roman Missal is not the only victim; we Dominicans also lost an ancient and beautiful rite which had preserved for centuries much of the simplicity and austerity that the *Missa Normativa* seeks to re-establish.)

A case could have been made for a limited period during which priests would have been compelled to use the *Missa Normativa* for all the main public masses in order to familiarise themselves and everyone else with it, but this need not have excluded the older rite on certain occasions and certainly by now it would seem that we could afford to permit this harmless eccentricity. It is quite clear that the Church as a whole is delighted with the new Mass and would not dream of returning to the blessed mutter of a previous generation. If hankering for the older form were simply confined to old men who find it hard to change and the immature who want to be different at all costs it could safely be ignored and allowed to play itself out.

It ought to be clear, of course, that the *Missa Normativa* simply succeeds in doing more humanely what Trent and Pius V were trying to do—to restore the Roman Mass *ad pristinam sanctorum patrum normam*; after a few centuries of historical and liturgical scholarship we know a lot more about these ancient norms than they did in 1570. It is an interesting thought that if our scholarship had been available to the Commission that worked under Pius IV and Pius V, full of men contemptuous of the medieval and intoxicated with the new classical learning and 'humanism's love for the clean, the unadulterated form', their Missal might have been an even chillier and plainer affair. Fortunately Paul VI's men had behind them the romantic movement and much else, they were aware that valid liturgical development springs from many sources, not all of them dating from the fifth century.

The Tridentine Mass represents a quite competent but not very adequate essay in liturgical reform, it also represents a dangerous experiment in liturgical centralisation. Still, no harm could come, you might think, from allowing people occasionally to perform a simplified

variation on this Tridentine Mass—it is doubtful whether in Downham Market or in the Station Hotel, Newcastle, the Sanctus Candle, for example (*Rit. Serv.* VIII.6) was in regular use, and still less likely that all communicants participated in the *purificatio* after communion (*Rit. Serv.* X.6)

There has arisen, however, one serious obstacle to this, one thing that stands in the way of the restoration of tolerance, and this is Marcel Lefebvre and his seminary at Econne. They have succeeded in making advocacy of the old Roman Missal a symbol of divisiveness in the Church, for their reason for preferring it is not cultural conservatism but their belief that the Pope and the Second Vatican Council were in heresy. It should be quite clear that it is Lefebvre and not the Pope who insists on absolute uniformity. To suggest, as was done in an extraordinarily badly informed article in *The Times* (August 7) that Lefebvre simply suffers from ‘excess of loyalty and orthodoxy’ is rubbish. Neither the Pope nor anyone else has ever suggested that it is a mark of heresy to celebrate the Tridentine Mass, but this is precisely what Lefebvre seems to suggest about the five hundred million Catholics who use the *Missa Normativa*.

If he and his cranks take themselves off into schism it will be a sad thing for them but not of any great importance for the Church as a whole—at least in the present healthier ecumenical climate they will not, like the Old Catholics, serve as a handy source of ‘valid orders’ for muddled non-Romans. The harm they can do is already done, regardless of any schism; they have narrowed the path of liturgical and sacramental development and given encouragement and excuse to the bureaucrats of the Curia.

The great Joseph Jungmann, writing in 1949, had this to say about the Tridentine reform of the Mass: ‘After fifteen hundred years of unbroken development in the rite of the Roman Mass, after the rushing and streaming from every height and out of every valley, the Missal of Pius V was indeed a powerful dam holding back the waters or permitting them to flow only through firm well-built canals. At one blow all arbitrary meandering to one side or the other was cut off, all floods prevented, and a safe regular and useful flow assured. But the price paid was this, that the beautiful river valley now lay barren and the forces of further evolution were often channeled into the narrow bed of a very inadequate devotional life instead of gathering strength for new forms of liturgical expression’. If the *Missa Normativa*, with all its excellence, is used by Curial officials to form this kind of dam then the life released in the prayer of the Church by Pope John and his Council will be stifled and a great deal of the blame will lie with Lefebvre, the lunatic Right and their sympathisers.

H.McC.