

PETER, PAUL AND MAGIC

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

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A certain musical passage always seemed to me to be a near approach to an adequate proof of the existence of God. This same passage seemed as well to be a justification of the existence of the roman catholic church and its liturgy in the form that we knew until 1969. It is Mozart's setting of et incarnatus est, from the Credo of the Great Mass in C Minor (K. 427). If you are familiar with the passage, you know what I mean. If you are not familiar with it, I commend it to your listening, because it is one of the most beautiful pieces of liturgical music ever written. Its very beauty is a part of the problem that I wish to address -- the changes in the liturgy of the roman catholic church and the reasons behind those changes. Is it right to expect beauty in a worship service, and, if so, what kind of beauty? More fundamentally, why do we need changes in a liturgy that has served well for hundreds of years? As you are probably aware, the question

is not necessarily confined to roman catholicism. Anyone familiar with modern protestant or orthodox liturgy will recognize similar issues that have arisen in those churches, and I understand that other religions face the same questions.

From the year 1570 until the early 1960's, roman catholics throughout the world celebrated a liturgy that, itself, seemed to be a solid basis for the church's claim to be catholic with a small "c". With minor exceptions, the mass was offered in a form unchanged and unchanging, in a language that could claim to be universal, partly because it was safely dead, and with a strictly limited role for the congregation.

What astounding changes have occurred. There has been a revolution in the roman church. Catholics throughout the world have been summarily deprived of a tradition that encompasses some of the greatest masterpieces of music known to man. Whether your taste runs to Gregorian chant, or Palestrina, or Verdi, or Mozart, or Stravinsky, you will no longer be able to worship

with their assistance in a catholic church. To some of us, the effect has been roughly the same as if the Vatican suddenly announced that the Sistine Chapel was being torn down to make room for a parking lot to accommodate American tourists.

You may quibble that Mozart and Palestrina were rarely heard in American catholic churches, and you would be correct. But there was a healthy and growing respect for the traditional music of the church, with an emphasis on Gregorian chant, and all of this was almost totally destroyed in 1969.

As some of us would ask, "cui bono?" Having spent an appreciable portion of the last seven years contemplating that question, in churches and elsewhere, I now think that I can propose an answer. Before I do so, I should also like to say that the contemplation of the question has been no easy task, and it has often been unpleasant. I still shudder at the banality of most modern church music. I join in happily at the singing of rousing protestant chorales. You should hear us at Martin Luther's "Ein feste Burg ist unser

Gott", but I'd rather you didn't listen when we sing one of Lou Fortunato's recent creations. There have been other, nonmusical, disasters. Think of the effect on an aesthetically sensitive soul when the story of the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana is rendered so that the Latin "architriclinus" comes out "headwaiter" in the passage where Jesus tells his disciples to fill six stone jars with water and then to draw some out and take it to . . . the headwaiter. It is not part of my religion that Jesus spoke in those terms.

There is also the problem of the "yoohoos". The ancient prayer, known formerly as the Gloria, includes phrases in Latin that begin with the pronoun "qui" and include a verb in the second person singular. Can you conceive of a body of churchmen who would translate these passages, in close succession as "You who . . ., you who . . . and you who . . ."? Fortunately, these and other aberrations have gradually been eliminated from the English version of the new order of the mass.

The elimination of lapses of taste does not, however, mean that traditionalist catholics have nothing left to complain about. The real issues are, of course, theological, and there are many of them. To focus on only one, which seems to be the most significant to the traditionalists, the central part of the mass, known as the eucharistic prayer, is now the subject of charges that it has been mistranslated. Specifically, this prayer includes a phrase in Latin "pro multis". This would seem, obviously, to require rendering as "for many". If you attend a catholic church next Sunday, you will hear the phrase, in English as "for all men". Questions of translation like this are currently threatening to cause serious dissension in the church and perhaps even schism. The recent news stories about the French archbishop, Marcel Lefebvre, illustrate the depth of feeling in France and in other countries, including our own, over the present ban on the celebration of the traditional form of the mass.

We return to the question why the changes have been made, and (we shall now revert to the vernacular, in accordance with the church's new teachings) "for whose benefit?" I for one have come around to an appreciation and, I hope, understanding of the new liturgy. The changes are, I am convinced, as revolutionary as changes will ever be in an institution that does not accept change easily, but I am also convinced that the changes will make the message of the church far more meaningful, and are therefore in accordance with the mission that the church is called upon to perform.

The roman catholic church's new liturgy of the mass, whose form stems principally from the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960's, is an attempt to deal with several interrelated problems in the practice of the old liturgy that came to be perceived by theologians, and to a lesser extent by lay catholics. These problems are: first, superstition, or a belief that the liturgy is a form of magic; second, aestheticism,

to which I must confess my guilt, (I was about to say mea culpa); and third, idealization. It will come as no surprise to noncatholics that the church has encouraged these evils, to a certain extent, but it is to the church's credit that they have been faced forthrightly. It is not very much to the church's credit that the church has done relatively little to make accessible to laymen the underlying purposes of its liturgical reform. In the sometimes unfortunate way that the church tends to do things, a perfectly sound and logical reform, perhaps even inspired by the Holy Spirit, has been thrust upon a catholic laity who has been told for years that there was about as much need for liturgical reform as there was for a new Martin Luther. In my own case, my interest in the subject came about primarily through reading philosophical attacks on metaphysics. I will have more to say on this shortly.



The first evil that I mentioned is magic, or superstition. There have always been, and probably always will be, a certain number of persons who describe themselves as religious believers and who believe that, through religion, some super-human power can be made to interfere directly with empirical reality. In this type of belief, religion is systemic control. The belief, for example, that a priest has magic powers to turn bread into something else is not essentially different from a belief that the right prayer will cause the river Nile to rise and fall at the appointed time. In the catholic church, this mentality has produced such pseudo-scientific and, more importantly, pseudo-religious studies as the chemical analysis of the consecrated host or even, in this century, a molecular study of the bread involved.

It would be difficult to try to determine how many people view religion as systemic control, or in plain English, magic. Their number undoubtedly includes many non-roman catholic

christians as well as catholics, although the nature of catholic liturgy has been more conducive to this type of belief.

Far more complex, from the standpoint of liturgical reform, are the beliefs of aesthetes and idealists. It is one of the ironies of the history of liturgical reform that some of its most earnest opposition has come from ecumenically minded non-catholics who subscribe to the aesthetic views I described at the beginning of this essay. For example, in England, the introduction of the vernacular to the mass was vehemently protested by a group including such diverse personalities as Robert Graves, Nancy Mitford and Graham Greene, who accused the Pope of dismantling a great cultural treasure.

In America, however, the aesthetes and intellectuals have tended to support some of the reforms up to a point. They include the so-called liberal catholics, who have focused on the church teachings that promoted social reform, and the conservative intellectuals, who have paid relatively little

attention to social reform but have concentrated more on the obvious intellectual attractions of a tradition that included a large proportion of the greatest artistic masterpieces of Western civilization, as well as great achievements in philosophy. Both liberals and conservatives could agree on a liturgy that de-emphasized magic and idealized its religious content. Many of this group of liberals and conservatives have accepted the new liturgy and have helped to make the changes work in practice in the parishes of American catholicism.

It should not be thought that the opposition and resistance to liturgical reform has come exclusively from superstitious yahoos or from reactionary intellectual aesthetes. There are both yahoos and aesthetes worshipping in both reformed and unreformed liturgies. If you are a catholic who thinks that the blessed sacrament has magic powers, you can feel comfortable in your views while worshipping either in a church attached to the catholic traditionalist (or anti-reform) movement, or in the parishes where

reform is clearly evident. Likewise, there are aesthetes and intellectuals on both sides of the fence.

It is time to recall that I referred to both the superstitious group and the intellectual idealist group as part of the problem in liturgical reform. For the reform, which has been revolutionary in its theological aspect, makes little sense if the church's only concern was to suppress magic or simply to abandon a dead language so that the idealists could do their intellectualizing without first translating from the Latin.

A full understanding of the new liturgy would require an extensive survey of scriptural studies, the ecumenical movement, theology and philosophy. I will not even attempt to weigh the relative influence that these different areas of study have had on the changes in catholic liturgy. Certainly, the advances in Middle Eastern archaeology in the 20th Century and the vast amount of information we now have on jewish

liturgies and forms of worship of ancient Israel have had much influence on today's catholic mass. Similarly, the recognition that ecumenicism does not mean compromise on central issues, but rather involves a mutual development of fuller understanding, has had its influence. It is theology and philosophy that happen to interest me, however, and I am going to talk about their influence on liturgy.

It is my thesis that the new liturgy of the roman catholic church reflects developments in modern philosophy, and particularly the philosophical views on religion expressed by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

In his Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein said, "Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar)." "Theology as grammar" is enclosed in parentheses and there is no further explanation of the phrase at that particular point although, as we shall see, it is clearly

the basis of Wittgenstein's philosophy of God and religion.

Is it appropriate to look to a philosopher for an explanation of theological questions? The answer to that question rests on an understanding first of the distinction between the philosophy of God and theology. A distinguished modern theologian, Bernard Lonergan, has explained the distinction as follows: the philosophy of God is knowledge of God that is not logically derived from revealed religion; theology (in its systematic aspect) receives revealed truths and clarifies their meaning. Lonergan goes on to say that "... the philosophy of God and [theology] have a common origin and common objective: their origin is religious experience, and their objective is to discover its significance and estimate its value."

We shall now examine the form of religious experience known as the catholic mass in its new form, in an attempt to discover its significance and estimate its value. As is well-known, the principal change in the form of the mass has been

the introduction of the vernacular and the abolition of Latin. There have been numerous other important changes, and I do not want to dismiss them as "technical" for they have their own deep significance. For our purposes, however, let us consider that the mass is still a form of worship in which the church asserts, and believers believe, that a significant religious event occurs when a duly authorized person repeats a formula which stems from the last supper of Jesus Christ and his disciples. The priest takes bread and says "this is my body"; he then takes wine and says "this is the cup of my blood"; the word "my" refers to Jesus. (I have quoted only part of the required words of consecration.)

What the priest is doing is not magic; he does not exercise systemic control over the bread and wine, and he does not change them into something other than bread and wine. If scientific tests are applied to the bread and wine, they will be found unchanged. Most traditionalists as well as most reformed liturgists will agree on this.

What the priest does is also more than symbolic, from the standpoint of both types of catholic religious believers, but it is at this point of the inquiry that the traditionalist and the new liturgist part company.

If the mass does not involve magic and does not involve mere symbolism, what is the content of the religious experience inherent in the ceremony? The traditionalist would tend at this point to give an answer, in philosophical terms, based on an Aristotelian approach which became highly refined in the medieval church. His focus will be on the questions "What has happened?" and "What is the consecrated bread and wine?" He is asking, "What is the true meaning of the symbolism that is employed?" but he is asking in a way that focuses on the substances, not on the action. This focus has, of course, led to the controversies over consubstantiation, transubstantiation, transignification and other arcane concepts which have served to keep generations of theologians gainfully employed.



Please note that the traditionalists and the new liturgists for the most part, agree on the choice of symbols. We are dealing with bread and wine, not beer and pretzels, or coke and potato chips, as some radicals would urge. Both traditionalists and new liturgists can agree that the symbol of a meal is appropriate, just as our presence here tonight, at a meal, is an appropriate way to symbolize the importance of the beginning of our club's season.

Both traditionalists and new liturgists are attempting to be sure that the bread and wine of the mass say everything that Jesus meant. The traditionalists, however, focus on the bread and wine by asking what change has occurred, and then by analyzing the change in terms of substance. The answer to their question is given in terms of accidents (or species) of the bread and wine, which remain unchanged, while the real "substances" become body and blood.

The new liturgists, on the other hand, ask what the central action of the mass is. They begin with the action which they believe was constituted to proclaim, as Paul said, "the death of the Lord until he comes",\* and they ask what we mean when we repeat this action.

The importance of the distinction between these questions is that the medieval questions about substance turn the focus of the believer away from personal action. Only the priest is empowered to change the substances, he performs a sacrifice, we have no part in it, and the only role left to the believer is to contemplate the drama, or idealize internally the concepts that he understands to be realized at the altar. The traditionalist - idealist contemplates the "real presence" and the sacrifice performed by the priest. The new liturgist on the other hand participates in a personal process of doing what Jesus did and asked his followers to do in his memory.

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\* 1 Cor. 11:26

Another important symbolic aspect of the mass is that of sacrifice, and here again, there are different levels at which the sacrificial symbolism may be perceived.

In terms of sacrifice, the believer who is still at the magical or systemic control stage of belief looks at the mass as a re-enactment of a blood sacrifice undergone by a representative of the human race to expiate guilt and bring back God's favor. The traditionalist-idealist moves beyond this primitive view and says that the sacrifice is a supreme manifestation of Jesus' love for God. This idealistic view leaves the believer as an onlooker at the sacrifice, which is admired and contemplated and is the subject of prayer. The new liturgist, however, seeks ways to become involved in the action of Jesus, and this is the purpose of catholic liturgical reform.

We will now turn to an analysis of this purpose in terms of modern developments in the philosophy of religion.

There are, of course, philosophers who deny that philosophical statements concerning religion can have any meaning whatsoever. The convinced logical positivist is not about to concede that religious statements are meaningful.

Bertrand Russell, as another example of a non-believer, regarded all significant statements as either true or false, and since neither science nor common sense could prove the truth of religious statements, he believed them to be false.

Other philosophers, however, take a different view, namely, that the unbeliever cannot contradict the believer, because the unbeliever's technique of language, or his form of life, is different from the form of life of the believer. The unbeliever may reject the believer's form of life, but he cannot, in a meaningful way, contradict the properly phrased statements of a believer. The believer, then, who relies on this aspect of modern philosophy and who has accepted the philosophical implications of liturgical reform, is in a position

to enter into philosophical debate and make his religious beliefs intelligible, even if not acceptable, to the unbeliever. The same cannot be said, however, of the traditionalist believer who relies on philosophy in its forms that pre-date the modern revolution in mathematics and logic. The traditionalist who idealizes the mass and analyzes substances is in a position analogous to that of a physicist who rejects modern physics. When confronted by a transistor, such a physicist would be forced to say nothing or to say that it works by magic. Similarly, the traditionalist asked to defend his religious beliefs regarding the mass can only rely on magic (which he and the rest of us all reject) or idealization -- the use of outmoded philosophical concepts that are shown by modern philosophies to be an abuse of language, that is to say, expressions that are grammatical and thus superficially meaningful, but in fact devoid of meaning. The modern physicist has the tools of quantum mechanics to verbalize the processes within transistors; the modern liturgist has the tools of modern philosophy to verbalize his religious belief.

Ironically, some of the most significant modern developments in the philosophy of religion stem from the same sources that fostered the development of movements such as logical positivism, which asserts that philosophy of religion is not meaningful. In the only major philosophical work of Ludwig Wittgenstein published during his lifetime, his studies of language led him to assert that from the logical structure of language we can draw certain conclusions about the nature of reality. This position, much to the distress of Wittgenstein himself, later became part of the foundation for the schools of philosophy which assert that statements which cannot be verified empirically are not meaningful. Wittgenstein contributed to these schools of thought through his famous and widely quoted aphorisms: "What cannot be shown, cannot be said." and "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." Some followers of Wittgenstein, particularly those who limit their consideration to his earlier work, say that what he meant was

"One does not wish to talk nonsense, and one will be doing so, if one talks about the mystical." I believe that a more correct interpretation is that Wittgenstein was saying "One does not wish to trivialize the mystical, and one will be doing so if one talks nonsense about it."

Efforts to avoid talking nonsense about the mystical preoccupy modern philosophers of religion. Even some logical positivists will now concede that a rational challenge to believers cannot be made by asking for empirical evidence. Their challenge is now made on the grounds of intelligibility - how to describe a religious experience as an experience, relevant to life, that is religious, and not something else, and how to differentiate religious experience from other forms of experience.

Believers assert that this can be accomplished by a philosophical process with three aspects. First: religious belief is logically distinct from other forms of knowledge.

Religion is not science, and confusing the two is simply superstition. Religion, however, is subject to the same demands of logic as other forms of thought. Second: religious belief involves a distinctive kind of discourse that is still a member of the logically interdependent family of all languages. For example, it is meaningful, in at least some sense, to speak of the eye of God, although, as Wittgenstein asked, "Are eyebrows going to be talked of, in connection with the Eye of God?" As in any use of language, pictures are used in religion, but care must be exercised in the technique of use. Third: there are essential differences between believers and unbelievers, but the two cannot contradict one another because they do not share the same form of life.

The question then is presented, "What is it to be a religious believer?" Wittgenstein offers a threefold answer. First, a believer's use of his pictures is explanatory in the sense of giving significance to his life. Second, the believer's



use of his pictures is commissive, in that he will take certain actions based on his beliefs, and finally, his use of pictures is affective; his pictures cause emotional response, for example, pity or terror or awe.

This is the context in which the new liturgy of the roman catholic church becomes meaningful. Parenthetically, I should point out that Ludwig Wittgenstein was probably not a believer and my reliance on his work is not intended to drag him posthumously and unwillingly into any church. I will also point out, however, that his work has affected many believers, and the gospel according to St. Ludwig is ever more widely studied by modern theologians.

Back to the new liturgy. It is possible to be philosophically and theologically satisfied with mass in the vernacular, an interior process that is no longer a mere drama, a remote idealization or an aesthetic experience. This religious process can be explanatory in a way that is intelligible to believers

and unbelievers, even though the latter do not share the underlying belief. Similarly, this process can be commissive in shaping the activities of the participant, which is an intelligible concept, and finally it can be affective in a manner that is intelligible even to those who do not share the process as a "form of life." of their own.

Finally, I must confess (one last mea culpa) that Mozart's Mass in C Minor is still a religious experience, but I have a new perspective on its significance and value.