

Liturgy and Impersonality

by Fergus Kerr, O.P.

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Wherever one goes these days, at least in this country, Catholics seem to be at loggerheads about liturgy. Some dream with nostalgia of the old rite (Pius V, 1570), deploring the all but total disappearance of the Latin language and Gregorian chant; others are irked (now that they have been made conscious of liturgy and the possibility of changing it) either by the manner in which the new rite is performed in their locality or by the failure to reform it much more radically. Some feel they have been arbitrarily bereft of a rite that expressed their experience of God in faith as adequately as anything ever could; while others feel that they have had imposed upon them a compromise rite, bookish and wordy, that doesn't (now they have come to reflect on such matters) embody or direct the very secular and reticent groping for God in the ambiguity of faith which seems their personal experience. Plainly one must always expect some hiatus between the ten o'clock mass in the parish church and the liturgy of one's dreams, and the reason for this, as we shall see, goes far beyond the fact that the children fidget. But some of the prevailing malaise is surely unnecessary and it seems worth while trying to dissipate it.

Part of the problem has recently been exposed in these pages by Brian Wicker and Ian Gregor (*New Blackfriars*, May 1971), reporting and reflecting on a visit to Holland. They make the point that the particular style Catholicism now displays in Holland depends essentially on the domestic situation: the liturgy there is simply a form of the culture. And while the principle of such local development should be imitated more widely, it would (as the Dutch themselves apparently insist) be very odd—in fact nonsensical—if the outlook and sensibility natural and appropriate in Holland were to be reproduced *tel quel* anywhere else. Our sense of God requires to be mediated; it requires to be 'substantiated' in the sense of being given some 'objective correlative'. Whether it be certain times and places, a set of objects or a set of propositions, or whatever, there must be something 'external' which evokes and sustains (without of course ever completely and exhaustively *rendering*) this sense of being dependent, for life and for significance, upon some transpersonal principle. It is the way in which these perhaps very disparate elements cohere to form an evocative and sustaining medium—an effective focus—for the God-experience that is bound to differ from one culture to another and thus give rise to a distinctive religious outlook and sensibility. It is surely clear, as Wicker and Gregor go on to say, that the extraordinary combination of antithetical currents of feeling (of Irish and Italian provenance respectively) makes English Catholicism quite unique.

What they want to highlight, however, isn't simply the point that styles of liturgical worship must vary from culture to culture, and that there is an inheritance of extreme anti-syzygy in English Catholicism such that 'the Catholicism of modern Holland comes as an almost unmanageable shock', but that we are perhaps all now tending to neglect 'that great area of impersonality which is so integral a part of time-honoured liturgical practice'. They spell this out in terms of 'that liturgical dimension which is concerned with creating a sense of awe and mystery', and refer to such matters as 'sacred space' and the 'distancing effect' of the rubrics. Summing up, then, they conclude that 'we are in danger of over-stressing the self-consciousness of faith, the rationality of its commitment'. It seems to me that this idea of 'impersonality' is an important one and that it will bear some further exploration. In the first place, impersonality characterizes a whole style of liturgical worship; secondly, it is in a sense the object of worship. As 'how' as well as 'what' we worship, impersonality seems forsaken in much contemporary liturgical practice and theory.

Rite and style

The eucharistic rite in Catholic worship used to be notorious for the impersonality of its style. It is face and voice that reveal personality. The face of the celebrant remained averted throughout the greater part of the ceremony and his voice was either reduced to an anonymous murmur or distorted out of all recognition in a high-pitched exotic semi-oriental chant. Now, however, the personal approach of the celebrant seems to count for a good deal in establishing the atmosphere in which the ceremony may be enjoyed.

The difference in approach may be illuminated, I think, by adducing some remarks which Willa Muir makes in her fine study of the ballad-singing tradition in the north-east lowlands of Scotland (*Living with Ballads*, 1965). She distinguishes between two entirely different styles of singing which she first detected one summer evening in 1906 in Kincardineshire when she heard two ploughmen sing: 'Harry sang his ballad as if sure of understanding and sympathy from his audience. There was no need for personal invitation, emphasis, or deprecation from him. Consequently, he himself faded out of the song as he sang it. The ballad needed only to sing itself. Sandy, on the other hand, sang as if unsure of his audience. He had to invite people to listen, to cajole them by deprecation, to nudge at their attention, to entertain them by clowning'. Harry's ballad was of local provenance while Sandy's had come over from Ireland and must have been sung in Scotland originally by singers who had consciously and calculatingly to draw their listeners into a different world of feeling (so Mrs Muir argues). What is interesting, as she observes, is that Sandy had taken over the audience-conscious style of singing the foreign song and continued

to respect it, even though the song itself had been imported perhaps as much as fifty years before. These are, of course, the two extremes of a long spectrum of approaches, but at one end the singer is so sure of his community with the audience that he simply ignores them, whereas at the other end they have so little in common that he feels he must work hard to arouse and retain their attention. In one case the ballad almost sings itself and the singer becomes totally subservient to the song; in the other, given the felt absence of community between singer and audience, the song requires to be *presented*, which means that the singer cannot take his eye off the audience but must be alert to react to their mood. As Mrs Muir says, it is the difference between hearing a ballad sung first by Jeannie Robertson of Aberdeen and then by some commercial folk-group. The feet will be set tapping by the beat of the group and the audience will soon 'sing along'; but it is a different experience altogether from the almost uncanny authority of the old lady's rendering and the rapt silence of the listeners.

Jeannie Robertson's authority—the almost arrogant indifference she shows to audience-*'participation'*—springs from her complete trust in the truth of the world of feeling disclosed in the ballad tradition and from her confidence that no one would ever want to hear her sing unless he shared her feel for this truth (it is a *'feel for'* rather than a *'belief in'*). The ballad as she sings effects its own meaning, she serves merely as an instrument. If the listener can accept the world of feeling she inhabits and represents, then the dreamy and almost preternatural rhythm of her voice and its peculiar raucousness must articulate something in him at a very deep level (chthonic or ancestral memory?) which otherwise defeats utterance. This is *'participation'*, but it assumes a community of feeling at a very deep level between singer and listener, and it accords priority to strata of experience far deeper than the conscious and rational and civilized.

The ballad tradition is not exactly like the tradition of eucharistic celebration, but it seems to me that the comparison is valid and can be illuminating. There is nothing wrong when the singer has to cajole his audience into the world of his song, it simply means that they belong to separate worlds; there is nothing wrong with participation at the level of joining in with the folk-song chorus. But it is a different experience (a diminished experience I believe) compared with listening to some one like Jeannie Robertson. When community of feeling has gone, however, participation at a relatively superficial level is as much as can be expected. The ballad may continue to gratify sentiment but it loses the potency to reverberate in the midriff. Something comparable seems to have happened to the Catholic rite. Where it was once left to speak for itself, it is now becoming an act of conscious communication. The impersonal rite that had its resonances of meaning because the

participants unquestioningly shared a common field of significance and value has given place to a ceremony that has much less to call upon in the way of unconscious community. There are two points here. In the first place, the relationship between celebrant and congregation has changed; it is felt now, rightly or wrongly, that the attention of the congregation requires to be actively roused and sustained by the celebrant because the rite by itself can no longer hold them. In a society in which there is no longer community of feeling about matters of ultimate significance and value it is inevitable that this change should occur. The priest who has to celebrate the eucharist for people who are for the most part (as he too may be) groping and sceptical in faith cannot leave the rite to speak for itself but must intervene personally to *commend it*. It is very easy for him to misjudge the congregation: he may assume too much or too little, he may appear intrusive and laborious to some but insufficiently explanatory and invitatory to others. Now that the event itself has so often to be used to establish the preparedness for it which people could once be assumed to have in advance, far more responsibility for the 'success' of the occasion falls on the celebrant.

Secondly, then, it is a matter of a 'feel' for the rite rather than simply of faith in what it does. Perhaps even at the level of conscious belief about the eucharist we are uncertain and divided, but the unanimity we have apparently lost surely lay far deeper than that. What we *say* about the eucharist certainly matters and it is important to get it right; but it is what we *feel* about it that counts most in the end. To insist on this is not to reduce taking part in the eucharist merely to an emotional or an aesthetic experience. It is simply to say—what surely everyone knows from experience—that the value a Catholic places on the eucharist comes in practice not so much from conscious decision and rational analysis but primarily from sharing a whole atmosphere of reverence. A faith shaped and sustained by the mass is a faith shaped and sustained more by posture than by reflection. It is how one stands or kneels that reveals and confirms the quality of one's faith, not how articulate or orthodox one's ideas on the matter. The significance—the total upshot—of the eucharist isn't stated but enacted; which doesn't mean that *nothing* of the significance may be stated, only that the kind of significance which the eucharist has cannot be properly apprehended except in actual performance. The 'success' of the liturgical performance (the language there isn't inappropriate) depends a great deal on 'atmosphere', and 'atmosphere' is created by how things are done, by the pace and the tone of delivery and gesture and many such imponderables. The 'success' of the event may also be measured in terms of how we are moved. Again, this is not pushing 'too far' the implied parallel with a theatrical performance. While there are plainly many important differences, the fact remains that the eucharist is a *rite*, a dramatic *action*, and it therefore 'works' in the

same kind of way as a play does. That is to say, it engages us far more than simply consciously and rationally. It touches us, it moves us. In the case of the eucharist we contemplate an action—a *death*—and yet instead of being depressed we receive a sense of renewed vitality. Without seeking to induce or endorse any false emotionalism, one may surely adduce the fact that most Catholics have had the experience of some eucharistic celebrations which have meant far more to them than others. Perhaps the occasion was particularly significant (a wedding or an ordination); perhaps the place was particularly hallowed (Lourdes, Scalan); perhaps the group was particularly congenial. . . . It would be impossible to list the factors that conspire to make a celebration a turning-point (a significant moment in one's personal pilgrimage towards God, of course, not just a memorable aesthetic or sartorial event). It is simply a matter of fact that some celebrations are more 'meaningful' than others, but also that it is imperative to make every celebration be as telling—as 'revealing'—as the particular situation allows or requires. This would not be to seek instant gratification, a new form of pietism. On the contrary, it is simply to rejoin the old Catholic tradition of celebrating the rite with as much care and objectivity as possible. Truth is often best revealed through beauty.

The starker and the more uncompromising the style of the ballad the deeper the level at which the listener is moved—but many of us cannot bear that much reality. Certain reaches of experience are no longer so easily touched. It is perhaps the same with the rite.

Rite and symbol

The question is what rite actually *does*. Why should there be rite at all? Before exploring that problem we should, I think, notice that, whatever else may be involved in being a Catholic, *rite*, in the sense of liturgical worship, is fundamental and even constitutive in the Catholic approach to God. Faith isn't just a process inside the head, a 'mental state'; on the contrary, faith is disclosed and enacted in bodily participation in rite. The acknowledgment of God which is faith *happens* as liturgy. One need only think of the picture of the original Christian communities as preserved for us in the writings of Paul or in the Book of Acts to realize how essential rite was in their faith-experience. This is not to deny that the *form* of rite hasn't altered a good deal. The 'experience' of the rite of baptism, for instance, as it was celebrated in Jerusalem in the middle of the fourth century, was plainly very different from what we see now. The candidates, mostly adult men and women, stripped naked, allowed themselves to be covered all over with olive oil and then to be led down into a large tank of water in which each was vigorously ducked thrice by the bishop. It is not difficult to see that psychologically this must have been a very different experience from the baptism of a convert these days. The Orthodox, of course, insist on

immersion, but are not often faced with the problem of baptizing adults (I know, however, of a recent baptism in which the candidate, a young man, chose to be completely naked despite the misgivings of the priest, and the ceremony went very well without any of the congregation being shocked). The very idea of one of our bishops immersing a naked adult gives rise to hilarious incredulity; it would seem simply impossible. Whether that particular form of the baptismal rite may be recuperable among us in the future one cannot tell. It seems obvious, however, that a good deal of the impact of the ceremony must have gone with the abandonment of the practice of total immersion and the undressing that necessarily preceded it. The symbolism of stripping and of going totally under the water, as the patristic commentaries make clear, enhanced and heightened the ceremony so that it affected people—the witnesses as well as the candidate—far more deeply than modern Catholic and Protestant practice ever can.

No doubt the northern climate played some part in the gradual disappearance of the ancient practice. In the later medieval period, of course, the sign-value of the Catholic liturgy had been reduced to the bare minimum (this seems to me to be reflected in the 1570 rite). Erich Heller has argued, in *The Disinherited Mind* (1952), that it is to the eucharistic doctrine of Ulrich Zwingli that we must look if we want to see the emergence of a new conception of the efficacy of symbol: 'I do suggest that at the end of a period that we rather vaguely call the Middle Ages there occurred a radical change in man's idea of reality, in that complex fabric of unconsciously held convictions about what is real and what is not'. Arguing in 1529 against Martin Luther (who remained, in this respect at least, essentially a man of the Middle Ages), Zwingli reduced the status of the consecrated bread and wine to 'mere symbols'. It is not so much the fact that his doctrine of the eucharist is untraditional but rather his new understanding of the possibilities of symbol that distinguishes Zwingli from his predecessors. He could no longer expect so much of a symbol. Where the medieval sensibility could accept a symbol as a disclosure of reality and truth, the new approach could not be so confident. The status of symbol as a mode of perceiving reality continues to be a matter of controversy—it has perhaps become increasingly polarized and urgent in recent years. Though at the conscious level Catholics went on holding a belief about what happens in the actual performance of the eucharistic rite which depends entirely on a general theory about the power of symbols, and continue to do so, may one not wonder whether the drastic attenuation of so much of the symbolism—its being allowed to atrophy to the most exiguous and perfunctory form—doesn't mean that, all unwittingly, Catholics in fact surrendered to the general scepticism? There are other instances to show that Catholics, while vigorously opposing certain principles in theory, effectively succumb to them in

practice. It remained possible to will belief determinedly in the essential value of the rites, but the total sensibility—the heart and body—which once collaborated in the experience of God in faith, was allowed to become inactive and irrelevant. In the case of baptism, for instance, the body as a whole is now ignored and the rite concentrates primarily on the candidate's *head*. (Not that one should jump too quickly to conclusions: from the cult of the *tête coupée* among the Celts to the reflections on the primacy of the *caput* in Thomas Aquinas, the head has always been regarded as a potent symbol of the person as a whole in the culture that underlies western Christianity; our baptismal practice may perpetuate a venerable head-cult rather than a puritanical flight from the naked body.)

It is easy to detect conflicting purposes in the far-reaching liturgical changes initiated in the Catholic Church in the late 'sixties. Everybody wants to make the rites more intelligible, only some assume that the concept of intelligibility is perfectly clear. For them, we have no more to do than to make the rites intelligible to our contemporaries, who, being 'modern', cannot be expected to cope with a hierophantic ceremony but require a piece of understandable worship in which they can take a conscious and rational part. This is very likely the view of those who exerted most influence in the composition of the *missa normativa*, though others, holding the same unexamined assumptions about canons of intelligibility, would wish to see a far more thorough-going attempt to make the rites acceptable to secular and urbanized people in a technological society. On the other hand, the reform of the rites may be seen as a revitalization of the symbolic dimension and thus as part of the multifarious but increasingly united and determined critique, within secular and urbanized society, precisely of the standards of intelligibility which now prevail. And to see that meaning may be pursued in more ways than we have come to assume, though it does undoubtedly lead to futile dabblings in the occult and to much woolly thinking and silly posturing, can also liberate consciousness in invigorating and revolutionary ways. There is more to *understanding* than those realize who accept uncritically positivist canons of intelligibility, simply because there is more to *being human*.

It is the nature of human nature that is at issue in the controversy about the function of symbol. Catholics are to be found on both sides though it seems plain that religion in any form becomes untenable unless one trusts symbol. On the other hand, it is obviously possible to place a high value on symbol without believing that rite—rite such as the eucharist at any rate—can be made to disclose any significance. The future of rite as a source of meaning is in the hands of those who celebrate it. Nothing 'real' can be disclosed in rite except to the degree that some deep level of the participant's being is touched. There is a movement of assent on the part of the believer which, if too slight and obscure to be regarded as conscious will, is nevertheless the

ground from which issues his orientation to life as a whole. He feels a sense of there being in himself something which is both his own and yet more than that—something which is not alienating but still strange. He feels impelled by what Thomas Aquinas would call an *appetitus naturalis boni*: a yearning for the source of all value which is part of human nature; or an *instinctus divinus*: an attraction, a prompting, which is nothing other than the presence of the Holy Spirit. Plainly, in Thomas, it is a matter of ontological analysis and not of psychological experience that the believer is ‘drawn’ by something in himself which also transcends himself; but he is reflecting in the context of Augustine’s writings on the nature of faith and it is difficult to suppose that he would have excluded any experiential, affective dimension (cf. the non-conceptual intellectual element in the act of faith discussed by Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Concept of Truth and Theological Renewal*, 1968). The justifiable Catholic distrust of pietistic emotionalism must not keep us from yielding to the mystical element in faith—or rather, as I would say, the impersonal element. The more we trust the rite to evoke our faith the more the desire to trust it will grow (itself of course already the prompting of the Holy Spirit). It is this sense that there is always more in the rite than we can ever say that I want to focus on because it is also the sense that the rite *does* something for us that nothing else quite can.

It is an essential part of the resistance to positivism in our culture to insist, in the words of F. R. Leavis in *The Common Pursuit* (1953), that ‘there are profounder levels; levels of experience that, though they tend constantly to be ignored, are always, in respect of any concern for life and health, supremely relevant’ (page 129). He is arguing, of course, that Shakespearean tragedy, as an experience that invokes and explores matters of ultimate significance, induces or perhaps rather articulates a certain ‘transcendence’: ‘Actually the experience is constructive or creative, and involves a recognizing positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death. It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, “In what does the significance of life reside?” and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it value, that makes the valued appear unquestionably more important than the valuer, so that significance lies, clearly and inescapably, in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself’ (page 132). It is surely not improper to appeal to such profound reflections on the nature of tragic drama in order to throw light on the nature of the eucharistic rite. Admittedly, the latter developed, historically, from the Jewish domestic ritual of the *berakah*, and the relationship between liturgy and secular drama in the Middle Ages is a good deal more complicated than is sometimes suggested; but for all that there can be no mistaking that the Christian rite and the Shakespearean tragedy have a good deal in

common. I suppose that one runs the risk of being accused of wanting to theatricalize the liturgy—plainly this has often happened in the past (pontifical benediction in a baroque church . . .) and, according to report, seems to happen sometimes at experimental liturgies today (offertory dancing, use of balloons . . .). Such events may be entertaining; they certainly cannot do for us what I believe the eucharistic rite must if it is allowed to be what it is. If we leave the theatre at the end of a performance of a great tragedy feeling that we have been made to face something essential about human life, then surely we should leave the church with a similar consciousness.

Whatever else the eucharistic rite may be found to be about, it is surely (if it is about anything real at all) about the 'significance of life'. And the significance lies, surely, 'in the willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself' (almost the classical definition of the act of faith). Furthermore, as the rite unfolds, it is precisely a recognition of 'positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death'. As Dr Leavis says, speaking always of tragic drama: 'We have contemplated a painful action, involving death and the destruction of the good, admirable and sympathetic, and yet instead of being depressed we enjoy a sense of enhanced vitality' (page 127). Surely when one 'goes to mass' it is a painful action—a death—that one encounters: the death of Christ; and similarly it is with a sense of renewed life and of joyful hope that one comes away and not of depression at the futility and pointlessness of human existence. The rite establishes, to adapt another phrase, 'a kind of profound impersonality in which experience matters, not because it is mine—because it is to me it belongs or happens, or because it subserves or issues in purpose or will, but because it is what it is, the "mine" mattering only in so far as the individual sentience is the indispensable focus of experience' (page 130). Surely it is a comparable 'impersonality' that the eucharist establishes, ideally, where experience matters, and significance is revealed, not because they subserve or issue in conscious purpose or will on the worshipper's part but simply because they are what they are, *ex opere operato*. It is at a level far deeper than conscious will that one is moved. What we have to do with in liturgy (leaving aside now the case of tragedy), is *metanoia*: 'conversion'—a transforming of perspectives and expectations, both in self-knowledge and in knowledge of reality, which *may* sometimes occur in observable moments of special insight or of emotional intensity, but is more commonly, and perhaps more healthily, a steady re-direction of the personality as a whole. What the rite *does* for the participant, if performed appropriately, is to precipitate a certain self-transcendence.

Impersonality and transcendence

The rite is meant to be an 'experience of transcendence'. But, as Dr Leavis says, the self is conceived only too often these days as

'confined, for all self-transcendence, to external transactions with other selves' (page 135). It is against this self-understanding, in which intersubjective transactions at the conscious level (*talking*, especially) are regarded as the only valid form of self-transcendence, that we must appeal to the possibility of *impersonality*. That is to say, the rite must be allowed to open and direct the worshippers to something 'impersonal', or perhaps rather to something 'transpersonal'. It cannot remain simply a celebration of their mutual relationships—a discovery of the significance and the sanctions immanent in the meeting of personalities at the conscious level. The meeting—the meeting as *rite*—must disclose the ground on which the participants take their stand—the sustaining ground from which they receive significance and sanctions. The consciously informal, anti-sacral, do-it-yourself style of liturgy surely inhibits experience of transcendence just as much as fanatical rubricism. As Sebastian Moore writes in *The Dreamer not the Dream* (1970): 'Mateyness, a liturgical style too much addressed to the people, too overtly concerned with putting them at their ease, seals off the depths in people just as does rigidity, its apparent opposite' (page 33). In fact, to my knowledge, no one has thrown more light on what has happened to the ten o'clock mass in the average parish than Moore does in this book. To sum up his argument should clarify my thesis and enable me to conclude on a practical note.

Essentially, so Sebastian Moore argues, the old style of liturgy was addressed to our dreams: 'the purpose of the form was not to communicate with the people in the ordinary way. It was not to bring them into the conversation. It was not to build up a conscious level of communication under which the deeper levels might become active. It was addressed directly *to* the deeper levels. It was an emblem of the deep mystery. Thus the personality of the priest was totally (and mercifully) suppressed. He was simply an agent of the mysterious communication with God, and the very orderedness of the rubrics, their coming from an external authority charged with maintaining the sacred tradition, served to emphasize the element of mystery. The point I am making is that the rigid and uniform mass we were brought up to *was* rigid and uniform because it was not addressed to ordinary conscious awareness at all but was, as it were, the representative of everybody's unconscious, making as little sense in plain everyday terms as do the messages that come over in dreams' (page 31). Any one who has followed my argument so far should understand that. Apparently we could no longer simply enjoy the dream-logic of the old rite which took us out of ourselves, as some would now say, into a world of private fantasy which alienated us from one another and dissipated our energy for work and social concern. Perhaps. It seems to me, however, that the oddly careful and ceremonious somnambulism of the old rite at its best did take us out of ourselves onto a common ground upon which we met and

renewed our solidarity at the level of the world of inexpressible and hardly faceable hopes and fears about our destiny. But clearly it was very strange—profoundly anachronistic—that our liturgy should still have been working on us as if we belonged to Jeannie Robertson's ballad world. That is surely one way of making the point. The liturgy went on working in a way elaborated in and appropriate to a pre-industrial culture with an entirely different sort of consciousness. It may well be that liturgy cannot make proper sense except in such circumstances; but assuming that it can still offer us a way of 'making sense', we should expect a modern rite to work on us as differently from the old rite as the mode of a modern poem is from a ballad (to stick to the analogy).

This means, as regards the style of celebrating liturgy today, that (as Sebastian Moore says) 'the mass has to be relaxed or it spells death to the spirit. But the *purpose* of its being relaxed is so that it shall not hold people at its own level but leave them free to feel, to contemplate, to breathe'. So he concludes as follows: 'A good liturgical performance will sit loose to the holiness of what is done and of what is handled. It is perhaps a test of this that it should appear irreverent to someone until he cottons on. What he has to cotton on to is that the performance is directed to and aims to foster a two-level awareness, and this demands a certain light-heartedness at the top level, like the odd earthy colloquialism in great poetry. The bread and wine are to be known as the flesh and blood of Christ at the deep creative level of our awareness where strange things make immediate and liberating sense. The eucharistic equation is to be made at the level where it liberates, and not at the empirical level where it merely puzzles. So our performance must not suggest that the equation is made at the shallow empirical level, and this it will suggest if we handle the elements in a stilted and fearful way. Holy fuss at the level where all should be ease and decent practicality prevents people from making their own highly personal equation of the bread and wine with Christ's body and his blood' (page 33).

Freedom to feel, to contemplate, to breathe—that is not given easily in our society and it is not to be expected that the liturgy will be more generous than the people who celebrate it. A great deal depends on the priest-celebrant; if he becomes obtrusive either by domineering mateyness or by bad-tempered hastiness then it certainly becomes difficult for people to enjoy the liturgy as they should. I hope that it is clear by now that if we can speak of 'enjoying' a Shakespeare tragedy we may surely also do so of 'enjoying' the liturgy. It is all a question of the depth at which this enjoyment takes place, and the paradigm of the drama suggests to me that the rite too, if only we let it, may give us, by contemplating a death, a new dimension of meaning and a sense of life. But it will do so effectively only if we maintain a certain matter-of-fact, reticent

impersonality in the style, and only if we see that the meaning the rite embodies must work on us in ways and at levels beyond our conscious, personal grasp.

Priesthood: Reflections on the Synod 'Working Paper'

I. Priest and Parish

by Edward Quinn

Then they sang the second verse of the *Tantum ergo* and Canon O'Hanlon got up again and censed the Blessed Sacrament and knelt down and he told Father Conroy that one of the candles was just going to set fire to the flowers and Father Conroy got up and settled it all right . . . Canon O'Hanlon stood up with his cope poking up at his neck and Father Conroy handed him the card to read off and he read out *Panem de coelo praestitisti eis . . .*

Sunday evening service in a West Riding town forty to sixty years ago was not very much different from the scene in the church at Sandymount on Bloomsday. For the priests it marked the end of a quite heavy Sunday, the climax of a by no means easy week. Two Masses in the morning with a sermon at each, fasting from midnight perhaps until 1 o'clock, baptisms and children's service, rosary—or Vespers—or Compline, another sermon, and Benediction. On the Saturday five or six hours' confessions. In this town as in many others of its kind, from Friday night to Sunday afternoon, all the time left over from church services and absolutely necessary meals and rest, was spent in house to house collecting. The parish priest might reserve to himself the task of counting or he might share it with the curates, thus lengthening the weekend's work to Monday midday. For some this might be followed by recreation on the golf links and dark murmurings with other clerical companions about the tyranny of parish priests. For the rest of the week, two hours of every day would be taken up with Mass and Office, there would be at least one evening service with a sermon, perhaps a confraternity meeting, instruction of converts (most of them marrying Catholics), a weekly visit to the school, visiting both of the sick and well (the latter being questioned, if necessary, about attendance at Mass and Easter duties). A conscientious priest might use some of the time left over to prepare his sermons.

It cannot be said that such priests had an easy life. It was not very different in a large city parish, where I spent my first years as a curate in the thirties. We were mercifully relieved of the task of