

struggle with words when there is anything worthwhile to say:  
 O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
 Frightful, sheer, no-man fathomed. Hold them cheap  
 May who ne'er hung there.

## The Mass of the People<sup>1</sup>

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As a priest, with the small authority of a priest that can be humbly accepted by higher authority, or quietly ignored, I should like to submit proposals for the form our celebrating mass might now take. To suggest changes at all, without offence, is difficult. All likely readers of this page will know the mass as an important, cherished and familiar ceremony in its present form, with roots deep in feelings and imagination, the sense of history and art, one's Catholic upbringing and loyalty. A whole tissue of potent, unrealised emotion attaches to the tiniest details and circumstances, making us shudder to think of change for the sake of change, or of any 'playing about'. Brother Choleric's tense, aristocratic, intellectual nun, hands up in revulsion at the mention of dialogue mass, is so funny because so true—of us all. Even innovators, who have merely managed to transfer their feelings from the actual forms to other imagined forms, become notoriously angry with other innovators, for the very same reason. I expect few supporters indeed.

There are, however, principles involved that we can all try to understand and agree upon. There is a mood in contemporary thought; a gaunt honesty and grim respect for people, and places, and materials, and things, just as they are, and confront us. The symbol of our day is the lens. As it affects religious thought, it becomes a principle that I think underlies all present movements in theology—our social teaching,

<sup>1</sup>This article was written before the promulgation of the Council's constitution on the liturgy, which in many ways is more radical; but we hope it will stimulate the necessary discussion of that constitution, which should be taking place at every level—EDITOR.

missiology, pastoral and biblical studies, the dialogue with other communities, and liturgical movement. Simply and basically put, and as such crude and deceptive, it might be described as a shift in balance, a seeking for a new centre, between the extremes: from religion as something 'other', in a 'heavenly' world, rich and strange, that we go out to, or await, or anyway think of as outside the terms of this one; what I might call the *apocalypse* side; towards religion as something 'here', 'in the midst', 'within you', that you awaken to, in this world and its circumstances; what I will call the *gospel* side.

Both are there. They are sides to religion. We think it quite natural and necessary that religion should be special; a high, difficult teaching, a particular activity in a special building—the church—with rich ornament and precious cloths and metals, everything rare and unusual; where voices naturally hush with the sense of presence and awe. The opposite extreme, with nothing special about religion at all, would be every individual or family finding afternoon tea a sufficient and satisfying service. In fact, something like that—the Christmas dinner; preacher, the Queen—is nearly all the religion most of our countrymen seem to have left; though there are signs of mere reaction to the opposite 'high' extreme.

Yet religion, which is here and now, *must* be here and now, and be *shown* to be here and now. It takes a jolting crisis, or crises, to make one realise how much of one's religion may be dangerous daydream, a stylised, communal release from personal inadequacy and disappointment, a revel in irrelevancies as relief from unfaced frightening fact. In fact, and though this is not the kind of thing a young writer should say, I have little hope of being understood here; unless, I shall have to hope—though this is worse—my dear readers will have undergone a few agonising crises, involving hate, failure or death, of the kind I mean, and that it seems are needed; to understand this. The 'here and now' insight, that it is we with our sour faces and grubby hands and ridiculous clothes who are accepted by God, and who must accept God, thrust under our noses this morning to be swallowed and taken in as food, is an insight that needs its expression just as much as the other, 'beyond it all', 'heavenly' feeling that is expressed so much in our present styles. The sanctuary with everything of rare stone and metal and material is exactly 'another world' in sight, and smell and sound. The murmur of a foreign language has the same effect, unintelligible and sinister, and heightened by the strained, remote, *enchanted* and dream-like singing. My readers, worn out with bleating the office, or contemptuous of the

parish choir, may forget and laugh at this. But the effect on audiences unfamiliar with it all is quite eerie and potent, over television for instance; I have been in households where quite a hush fell.

The religious attitude, of course, straining towards the ultimate in reality, timidly touching incomprehensibles, expects and respects the strange unintelligible, suspects the plain intelligible. The root thought grows *away* from the dry light to the damp dark. I am fumbling important issues, perhaps dangerously, here; but a balance must still be struck. How much of religion can we express, must we accept, as 'other world'; how much can we accept, must we express, as 'here and now'? The opposite, extreme poverty of *décor*—factory brick walls, wooden or china vessels, rough shapeless vestments—could express important truths too: that the only thing of full value is food, the only beings of absolute value are people, all real value is Christ's. Familiar simple language simply spoken could express the important truth, that the Church is in us. That it exists, is up to us, in our time and in our town. The inconceivable is in us, not magically outside in words and things: the bright spirit of love, forgiveness, understanding, and hope, or the dark demons of hate and rage and frustration and despair that take its place, dance on the ends of our eyelashes, twitch our lips and loosen or tie our tongues, whirl in our ears, every time and everywhere we listen and speak and look.

We who try to think about all this must decide for ourselves, and then try to lead others to see, where balance is best held. We can point out subtle dangers lurking in custom accepted as custom; like the soldier set on guard every evening on a London corner, no one knew why, but just 'done'; except perhaps, as was discovered, that a queen liked to walk that way two hundred years ago. The intense, below-thinking religious attitude, like the military, can be caught up like that in fierce, unyielding posture over something that just isn't so any more; in fact, all the more fierce for that. At the risk of provoking such ferocity I now offer a few practical principles for consideration.

Mass will continue to be said in different kinds of building for different kinds of people. Arguments and proposals will apply to one and not another. There will be the small chapel, where intimacy is the keynote; in a monastery or priory, convent, seminary, boarding school, or institution; a district chapel with close-knit congregation; the parish weekday mass, better said at a side-altar; or mass of a wedding or funeral. There is no danger of reverence being lost, but rather enhanced by intimacy. It is already possible to have full dialogue mass, with the whole

proper said together; to have hosts offered for consecration, as was recommended in *Mediator Dei* and completely ignored; to have prayer, epistle and gospel read by someone in English; the congregation gathered standing round the altar, lining up to place their hosts, and to receive them again, and perhaps processing in and out with the priest. I think such communities should adopt these forms at once, to prepare in mind for the further improvements possible: complete celebration in English, and even sharing the chalice in such circumstances. Remember, we shall be asked at the doors of heaven with the clear example of the last supper intimacy before us: 'Why not?'

There will be the ordinary church, with up to three hundred seats, where such is not possible, and where solemnity is required. At present dialogue mass is possible; with the clear precept and example of the Bishop of Rome, one should think almost obligatory. Readers can be trained to take turns at the prayer, epistle and gospel from the pulpit. Offertory processions are also feasible (if time is not available, during the sermon; which will find no greater obstacle to contend with, in the slight bustle, than in the somnolent torpor that settles at present). All would come forward to the altar (those for communion signing to a server to place a host for them), and place an offering in the collection (which might rise a good deal as a result of such prominence; and which is at present a distraction if not a scandal going on in the later silence). Communion would be given in the same way, as they come forward; the servers and those near responding loudly the 'Amen' after the administration prayer. All this would be quite possible next Sunday, without any special permissions.

Last comes what I will call non-technically the basilica, the huge church where a certain pomp is necessary. Musical and dramatic elaboration is possible. Traditional forms may well be retained here, but a real effort must be made to educate the people at those masses; and would be possible in some sophisticated urban societies, with large schools and literate backgrounds. It should for example be seriously considered that Latin be taught to all the children. Those priests, nuns and layfolk so passionate in its defence might be asked to teach, five hours a week, some of the difficult classes; unless, of course, they change their minds. It would have to be done, or tried, to make arguments in its favour at all convincing; to make sure that our people are not, as some of us suspect, imagined as herded, mystified, overawed and gaping serfs at all these splendours; but instructed, as all the popes of this century have demanded, to be actual participants in the ceremonies.

Now comes the form of the mass itself. This is basically quite simple in form:

The entry. Psalm and litany (both now fragments in introit and kyrie);  
Canticle (gloria);  
A full, 'standard' entry psalm, 42, a mutual confession between priest and people, and absolution prayer.

Prayer (Collect).

The reading of the epistle; a psalm or passage fragment (gradual) and a standard psalm fragment—150 (alleluia)—with another psalm; then the gospel; followed by a Declaration of faith, in sermon; and the creed.

The offering, with psalm or passage fragment (offertory)  
(the washing of hands was quite practical, once).

Prayer (secret); followed by the long Eucharistic prayer of consecration (the 'preface' and 'canon').

The Lord's prayer, with solemn introduction.

Communion, with psalm or passage fragment.

Prayer (post-communion).

Blessing, and dismissal, the 'mission' or sending to the world.

(The 'last gospel' was a priest's thanksgiving)

I think, and suggest most respectfully that this could be restored in full force if simple changes were made. For instance, the psalm fragments or passage fragments are not enough for our people, who do not know the psalms; they do not touch off the complicated response of the whole held in memory, with the mind steeped in them, as is meant. The entire psalm or passage could be said. Then, the 'priest versus people' dialogues could be changed in the spirit of the times to priest *and* people; for instance, simply saying the confession together, and leaving God to pronounce the absolution, in silence; as he does. Lastly, standard parts of the mass—the standard psalms, confession, creed, canon and Lord's prayer, could be said together, with the people trained in chorally speaking them. It is tremendously effective when done properly. It is remarkable how well the people do it, and how heartily, with the nearly impossible rhythms of present prayers like the 'Hail Mary' and 'Hail Holy Queen'. It would emphasise the message that we take to the world: that we are the Church, the *kyriakon* or 'work-of-the-Lord', his risen body on earth, to do his will and bring his reign—here, and now—if we can.

An ideal form of mass would be something like the following, with

variations according to the size, and the pomp or solemnity or intimacy required. For example, the psalms might be sung,<sup>2</sup> with antiphons chorussed between each verse by the people; said, together; or spoken quietly by a solo voice. The whole congregation could watch an elaborate representative procession; or process itself; or gather round informally. And so on.

The mass of the people would then be:

Entry in procession through the church.

The special psalm or reading of the whole passage involved; and the standard psalm 42 sung, where possible, during this. The Confession said at the foot of the altar all together (the kyrie, and gloria, could be left out except 'in season').

Prayer.

The reading of the epistle from the pulpit, and after it the whole (gradual) psalm or passage read; the standard psalm 150, sung where possible, and the other psalm, followed by the

Gospel.

The declaration of faith, with a sermon—even a one-minute sermon on weekdays about the saint or the season?—and the creed on Sunday, said together.

The offering, with a procession, representative; or formal; or informal; with the whole psalm or passage read and a standard psalm—22, or 99.

(Secret) Prayer, said aloud by the priest.

The eucharistic prayer of consecration begun by the priest, and taken up by the people, 'with one voice', from the 'holy, holy holy . . .'

The Lord's prayer, after the short 'preface' said by the priest.

The communion after the priest's, with the people coming up in line; a simple form of administration used, such as 'the body of Christ keep you'; servers and those near answering each time. The whole psalm or passage said or sung, and a standard psalm said or sung—135.

Prayer said by the priest.

The blessing, and

Dismissal given at once; the priest leading the procession off, down to the door of the church; where he could spend a few valuable minutes seeing his people off, enquiring about the sick, meeting strangers; accompanied by the servers who would not, by the

<sup>2</sup>The Grail (Gelineau) version is excellent, and popular where it is known.

way, be angelic little boys—'angelic', 'other-worldly', and little, to make the priest loom 'large'—but prominent men of the parish, almost a vestry, also talking and helping to arrange the mission to the world, the 'mass' of the people of Christ. Now would be the time for short, practical, parish meetings, for that purpose.

I end by submitting a form of the canon or eucharistic prayer that shows what might be done, and as it could be read or spoken at any mass; even the traditional high mass if the *sanctus* and *benedictus* are omitted.

### THE REGULAR PART OF THE THANKSGIVING

*Priest:*

God be with you:

Lift up your hearts:

Let us thank the Lord, our God: It is right and just.

*Priest:* (the 'common preface'; Trinity kept, like the others, in season)

It is indeed right and just, fair, and saving  
in us to thank you, always and everywhere,  
Lord, holy Father, all-mighty and everlasting God,  
through Christ our Lord;

through whom angels praise your greatness,  
dominions adore, powers revere,  
the heavens, and the forces of the heavens,  
with the splendid seraphim acclaim,  
joined in a single joy.

With these, we pray you, let us join our voices  
to proclaim in humble praise, saying:

*Priest and people together:*

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord  
God of all heavenly forces;  
heavens and earth are full of your glory;  
'Hosanna' to the highest heavens;  
blessed is he who comes in the name of God;  
'Hosanna' to the highest heavens!

*All continue:*

Most merciful Father, we ask you, then, humbly,  
through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord,  
and we beg you, to accept and bless  
these gifts, these presents, these offerings;  
they are holy and unblemished.

We offer you them first  
 for your holy, Catholic Church;  
 come, throughout the whole world,  
 to give it peace, protect, restore to unity; and rule,  
 with your servant, our Pope Paul, with our Bishop, N,  
 and all those, loyal to the true teaching,  
 who have care of the Catholic faith of the apostles.

Remember, Lord, your servants and dependants . . .  
 and all these who are present,  
 whose faithfulness you recognise,  
 and whose devotedness you know.

We offer you for them, or they themselves offer you  
 this sacrifice of praise,  
 for themselves and all that are theirs,  
 to obtain the redeeming of their souls,  
 the assurance and safety for which they hope;  
 and to you they make their prayer,  
 to you, everlasting God, living and true,  
 joined in union with, and remembering  
 first the glorious Mary ever a virgin,  
 mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ;  
 blessed Joseph her husband;  
 then your blessed Apostles and Martyrs  
 Peter and Paul, Andrew, James, John,  
 Thomas, James; Philip, Bartholomew; Matthew, Simon and Jude;  
 Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus,  
 Cornelius, Cyprian, Lawrence, Chrysogonus,  
 John and Paul, Cosmas and Damian . . .  
 and all your holy ones;  
 through whose merits and prayers  
 grant us on every occasion  
 the help of your power and protection  
 through Christ himself, our Lord. Amen.

This offering, then, of our service  
 as well as your whole family's  
 we ask you to receive, and be appeased with,  
 to arrange our days in your peace,  
 and to save us from final condemnation,  
 counting us among those you choose  
 through Christ our Lord. Amen.



This offering do you, God,  
 come to bless, accept, and fully approve,  
 make of some account, and worthy to please you;  
 so that it becomes, for us, the body and blood  
 of your much loved Son

our Lord, Jesus Christ  
 who, the day before he suffered, took bread  
 in his holy and venerable hands;  
 with his eyes raised to you, God, his all-mighty Father,  
 thanking you  
 he blessed this bread, broke it, and gave to his followers  
 saying: 'Take and eat, all of you, for this is my body.'

In the same way, after the meal  
 he took this glorious cup in his holy and venerable hands;  
 thanking you again  
 he blessed it, and gave to his followers, saying:  
 'Take and drink, all of you, for this is the cup of my blood,  
 the blood of the new and final deal—the mystery of faith—  
 which will be poured out for you, and for many,  
 for the freeing of sins.

Whenever you do this, you will do it to recall me.'

So Lord, recalling the happy sufferings  
 of Christ himself, your Son, our Lord,  
 his rising from the depths of the dead,  
 and his climbing to the heights of glory,  
 we your ministers, and with us your holy people  
 present to your outstanding greatness  
 from the goods and gifts we have from you  
 a perfect victim, a special victim, an unblemished victim;  
 the very bread of eternal life, and the cup of final saving.

On these come to look  
 with favour and good will;  
 accept them, as you willingly accepted  
 the presents of your servant Abel the just,  
 the sacrifice of Abraham our father,  
 and what Melchisedech your high priest offered you,  
 a special sacrifice, an unblemished victim.

Humbly we beg you, all-mighty God,  
 to make these offerings be carried  
 at the hand of your holy messenger

on high, on your altar,  
 in sight of your divine greatness;  
 so that as we take our part, at this altar, in receiving  
 the most holy body and blood of your Son,  
 we may be filled with all graces and favours from above  
 through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Remember also, Lord, your servants and dependants  
 who have left us, in the signs of faith,  
 and who sleep the sleep of peace . . .

To these, Lord, and to all who rest in Christ,  
 grant, we beg, a place of restoring, of light, and of peace  
 through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

To us sinners, also, your servants,  
 who trust to your unending mercy  
 consider to give a place  
 in the company of your Apostles and Martyrs,  
 with John, Stephen, Matthias; Barnabas, Ignatius, Alexander,  
 Marcellinus, Peter; Felicity, Perpetua; Agatha, Lucy,  
 Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia . . .  
 and with all your holy ones.

To admit us into their company  
 do not go by the worth of our deeds,  
 but generously grant us your pardon  
 through Christ, our Lord,  
 through whom you always make good all these things,  
 you make holy, give life to, and bless them,  
 and make them a gift to us.

Through him, with him, in him  
 you receive, God, all-mighty Father,  
 in the one holy Spirit  
 all honour and glory  
 in all the ages of ages. Amen.

*Pause. Then the Priest:*

Let us pray. Advised by the Saviour's commands  
 and made bold at instruction from God  
 we dare to say:

*All together:*

Our Father, in the heavens, hailed be your name;  
 may your reign come; may your will be done  
 on earth, as in the heavens.

Give us today our day's bread;  
 and forgive us our failings, as we forgive those failing us;  
 and lead us not into trial, but save us from evil.

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At the risk of horrifying readers completely, yet hoping to convince by showing the work still to be done, may I mention difficulties that still remain and that I had to leave, not to renovate too offensively?

For instance, we use words like 'spirit'; but what do they mean? *Spiritus* is breathing, life itself. Can we say 'self' or even 'life', and hit off as much as we can expect to do? Try it a few times till one is used to it: 'and in your life'. The word 'bless' too, is a rich notion; and not make-the-sign-of-the-cross over; which is simply a gesture of indication, in the cross. We ought to opt for another word, like 'favour', or 'grace'. So with 'the blessed . . .'; isn't 'the favoured' better? The 'seraphim' raise a whole problem. Most likely it means the twin lights in the sky, the sun and moon. The whole is a cosmic build-up of forces, 'dominions' probably planets and 'powers' constellations; all powers under God, an idea that would excite people today, while it 'puts in place' the feelings, cunningly played on by astrologers, of being governed by these forces. 'Hosanna' is 'Save-us-now!' a cry of triumph to a leader, like (in the opposite way) 'Save the Queen!', 'Heil!' (that is, 'be hale'), and so on. It might, if well understood, and applied to Christ, 'save us now' from other hero cults. Finally, that little word sprinkled on every Christian prayer that hardly any Christian I ask knows the meaning of: 'Amen'. From the root *aman*, to stand firm, it means exactly what we mean in that (unfortunately slang) expression: 'Sure thing!'

What are we to do about all this? There is a difficult decision to be made. Our people at present—a select and loyal minority—could perhaps be educated to hold in mind and appreciate the semitic background to the *cherubim* and *seraphim*, *hosanna* and *alleluia*, *amen*. But why should they? Doesn't the word of God apply here and now, in their words? Isn't there danger of these words being just 'things-to-say', exactly like yippee, hooray, do-re-mi, and so on? And becoming slightly ridiculous? It has always disquieted me how often a court of law figures in English literature and drama, compared with its treatment in America, as a comic and absurd spectacle. 'M'lud', etc., the stilted expressions, pompous professionalisms, and the wigs don't help, I suppose. Do our equivalents help, or do they hinder, the approach of our people to God?

I wish and pray most heartily that clear decisions be taken, to land us

a living form of worship. For then we shall only have begun. There are gigantic problems before us, of structuring the parish so that the whole complexity of fully Christian life is 'working' in society: the children well taught, adolescents welcomed to adulthood, marriages helped, the elderly cared for, those in difficulties attended to; integrating Christians into society, bringing 'the reign of justice, love and peace'. The parish must become far more efficient even than a business corporation, must cease to be the one-horse show it is at present; it must be us, Christians at work. Huge problems! The shape of the liturgy is a minor one in comparison, one that concerns ourselves, that requires a clean decision forcefully applied, where the bishops have every right to apply it. It will open the windows to the needed fresh air, stimulate a general growth in holiness, ferment the heavy, inert lump of laity. Something is wrong, we are all aware. There seems no scope, no chance, no vision in the world of here and now; except a rightly despised dream of a milky-blue heaven, with an embarrassed mumbling of religious rhetoric, a vague hope for some dim, kindly light after death. Is what is missing a regular mass meeting, in pomp, or solemnity, or intimacy as occasion requires; a form of mass prayer for those alert to here and now, in words they can understand; a mass demonstration, for those aware, of the will of Christ, and of how it could be brought to be? Not the mass as we know it, or the mass as we would prefer it, or the mass to anyone's fancy or taste; but the mass for the mass of the people?