

hundred times, if I have been asked once, what is the best way of hearing Mass? In the old days, before the liturgical revival, certain well-meaning men sat down and wrote divers methods of hearing Mass! Today even school children know that there is really only one way of hearing Mass—and that the best of all—namely, to pray the Mass with the priest, to watch and follow what goes on at the altar, to read the prayers in the Missal, to realize that you, whoever you may be, are offering this sacrifice by and through the ministry of your agent, the priest. Do not let yourself be robbed of your priceless treasure even by the best-intentioned people!



POINT OF VIEW

I ONCE HEARD a long speech about a minor reform of the syllabus in which it was urged that as life was confusing a confused syllabus was good for the undergraduate. It got him used to it. The mixture of exasperation and amusement which I felt then I feel now upon reading Fr Pepler's article, 'Latin is still practical', in the June number of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, for his argument is very much the same.

There is to begin with something very wrong with his psychology. The truth is that like other educated persons he likes Latin. As he understands it he is able either to attend to the meaning, or to detach his mind and respond merely to cadences which his training had made recognizable and familiar to him, and which are weighted—heaven knows how they are weighted—with centuries of association. It is this and not want of familiarity which provides the mystery he speaks of. Let him hear Mass in Finnish, or Welsh, said very fast and I rather think that this connection of mystery with the merely unintelligible will not appear so certain to him.

But of course the pious Catholic is not unfamiliar with Latin. He knows it only too well and knows it as noises, not as meaning. The story of the server muttering, 'me a cowboy, me a maxima cowboy,' is not without its significance. Mere unmeaningful noises repeated Sunday by Sunday cannot fail to be dreary unless one is occupying the mind with something else—like saying the

rosary, or following some pious book of commentary on the action. Fr Pepler probably cannot remember when Latin was completely unknown to him, but he might use some imagination about the matter.

In the second place, I am surprised that a Dominican should fail to distinguish between understanding, in the sense of knowing what is being said, and understanding in the sense of comprehending; that is, of exhausting the potential meaning of a statement or an action. I may be said to understand a poem of Wordsworth's, its verbal form is simple enough; but this by no means suggests that there is nothing left that I can receive from or through it. And if Fr Pepler really thinks that a vernacular language is incapable of this central mystery then he had better impose on himself the discipline of reading a little poetry for his soul's health. Or even possibly the Anglican translation of the Psalms.

For, in the third place, the reasons for the use of the vernacular in public worship are a great deal more theological than he seems to recognise; they are the reasons why people commonly write poetry in their own and not in a dead language, why the matter of the Sacrament is Bread, why our Lord, the Divine Word himself the root, and type of all human speech, spoke not Greek, not Latin, not Hebrew, but the debased language of an obscure Roman Province. It is because a native language is the life of the mind, and the medium of a common life. What we unite with Christ's sacrifice is the offering of what we are, what personal, and what national, and what cultural history has made us. We also offer him the world in which we live—our ordinary speech carries all this because it has the same history as ourselves. Latin does not. It is acquired, and what is more, it is a dead language, it has no colour, no complexity which is not of the past. It is a language of the cloister, not of the world, and the cross, I might remind Father Pepler, was very much of the world, and is of it still.

I object to the attitude not because it is conservative and excessively sacerdotal but because it is essentially Puritan. Touch not, see not, handle not—and for heaven sake let us not expose the mysteries of religion to the coarse touch of common speech.

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