

Foreword

Pope John XXIII announced the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, subsequently referred to as Vatican II, in 1959. Preparatory work occupied the greater part of the next four years, formal sessions began in October 1962 and after the death of Pope John in 1963, continued until 1965 under the pontificate of his successor Paul VI.

Vatican II was an ecumenical, that is to say a general as distinguished from a local, council, and it was only the twenty-first such in the history of the Catholic Church. It was attended by more bishops from all over the world than any previous Council.

One word more than any other is associated in popular memory with Vatican II and that is the Italian *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date). The purpose of the Council, as envisaged by Pope John, was to survey every aspect of the Church's historical existence with this intent, and the result of its work was a massive restatement of Catholic teaching notably with regard to relations between the unique claims of the Church and those of other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions.

A quick mental survey of the multiplicity of cultures involved in the implications of so comprehensive a restatement brings the appreciation that changes approved by the Council's resolutions would not be swiftly implemented or, for that matter, universally welcome. The anthropologist will be particularly aware of the series of linguistic and cultural translations which would be required not only between but within cultures, the latter presenting more subtle obstacles than the former, and both levels calling for the most delicate political handling. Indeed, thirty years after the formal conclusion of the Council, debate continues over the interpretation of the letter and the spirit of the Vatican II, and some question whether the changes that have been introduced accord with either or both.

I have given this brief portentous account as a background against which to set two changes which (apart from a small dissenting minority) have been thought unexceptionable as, even to a non-Catholic, they must seem common-sensical and appropriate to modern times.

The form of the Mass before Vatican II had been settled by the Council of Trent (1545–1563), hence it is known as the Tridentine Mass. Ac-

According to its rubrics the officiating priest stood with his back to the congregation facing east and the entire Mass was said or sung in Latin. The changes after Vatican II, in addition to several less significant ones, required the use of the vernacular instead of Latin and, as Dr. Williams characterises it, the 180° shift of the presiding priest from a position in which he stood with his back to the congregation to a position in which he faces it across the altar. In many churches this has required the altar to be moved to create access or, where this is not possible, a new altar has been constructed in the sanctuary. Either move diminishes in varying degrees the distance between the altar and the congregation and demotes the altar from its old position at the furthest eastern extreme from the West Door by which the laity enter. In this connection it should be noted that on the 'old' altar stood the veiled tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament was reserved (its presence signalled by a red oil-lamp) and it was to the tabernacle that a Catholic would almost automatically genuflect on first entering the church. The tabernacle is now usually relocated in a side-chapel.

For the majority of lay members of the Church over the age of 45, these two changes of language and position of priest are the major effects of Vatican II. They may properly be described as its symbols to the extent that their significance and effect go beyond the appearances and beyond the intentions of those who initiated them; these we may safely assume were limited to a liberal-minded 'de-mystification' in the interest of a greater 'involvement' of the laity in the Mass.

From the point of view of the liberal clergy the laity had not been sufficiently involved, but what this can only mean is that the laity were not involved as the officiating priests were involved which is a very different matter. It might be of interest if I were to give a sketch of the laity, now seen as 'congregation'; an account limited to its location and physical participation in the Mass. I shall not be concerned with subjectivities and the spiritual benefits conferred on those who are present; it would not be going too far to say that their respectful presence *was* their participation. Such a sketch might serve to highlight the revolutionary quality of the apparently innocuous changes with which Dr. Williams's analysis is concerned.

We shall discover a strong hierarchical opposition which is transcended materially, and in accordance with Catholic theology, by the act of communion *across* the communion rail which is the sign of the opposition. It is important that we imaginatively appreciate that for centuries and for millions of Catholics all over the world this enactment

was their major, regular experience of the Church as it was the Church's supreme expression of its nature and purpose. Such an appreciation sharpens our awareness of the impact of the changes introduced. For example, the communion-rail was quite commonly called 'altar rail', a term which indicated the extent to which the whole sacristy was a kind of lower step but part of the altar. The rail has now been removed in many churches and with its departure has inevitably gone the sense of a discrete sacred space.

In the Tridentine Mass the congregation were confined to the nave of the church, that is the area between the west door and the sanctuary. The nave was divided from the sanctuary by the communion rail. The area which in the Catholic Church is called the sanctuary used to be called the *chancel* and this term is retained in the Anglican Church. The word is derived from *cancelli*, the lattice work which separated the officiating priest(s) from the rest of the church. Indeed, originally the area thus protected was called the *presbyterium*, literally the meeting-place of the presbyters, and only later took its name from the *cancellus*, the low screen that in time replaced the lattice work, the origin of the communion-rail. It was to this divider that those who wished to take communion (communicate) came to receive from the priest standing on the sanctuary side of the rail the consecrated wafer which he placed directly on their tongues. No member of the laity set foot in the sanctuary.

One apparent exception to this rule is instructive. The 'altar boys' who administered to the presiding priest, the thurifer and his attendant, were not (and are not) ordained priests. The alternative term 'acolyte' gives us the necessary clue. The acolytes were in times past the highest of the four minor orders of the Latin Church and were ordained by a bishop to that order with the function of assisting the priest at Mass just as their modern successors do although, historically, they acquired more exalted duties and privileges.

The minor orders have now fallen into desuetude as their functions faded or were absorbed by higher orders, notably the diaconate, but the logic of the Tridentine Mass required these sub-ordinates and the employment of young boys wearing a form of clerical dress met this need. Following the logic of the Tridentine Mass we can accept the 'altar-boys' and others as, literally, *nominal* clergy.

This speculation is strengthened by the known history of the choir. Originally those who sang in the choir were ecclesiastics and boys not

only trained by ecclesiastics but who, it was assumed, would later be ordained. Musicological developments in the course of time made the training of singers a more specialised business and the laicization of the choir can be dated from the pontificate of Gregory XI (1370-1377); as the choir came to be composed of lay members, including women, under lay direction, it was removed from the sanctuary and relocated, usually in a gallery.

It is worth drawing attention to the obvious point that the division between nave and sanctuary creates not only an exclusively clerical but also an exclusively masculine area. Dr. Williams's analysis will make it clear why only now (in recent months as far as the United Kingdom is concerned) girls have been admitted as 'altar girls' and why it has been felt necessary to warn or reassure the faithful, as judgement dictated, that this is not to be understood as a step towards the ordination of women!

The congregation is also defined by its actions. For defined periods they sat, stood or knelt and they made formal responses to the priest's prayers. At the time of the consecration and elevation of Host and Chalice the kneeling congregation looked up and bowed their heads. Apart from these participations it is assumed that the congregation was engaged in private devotions, the rosary or prayer book; even in literate societies those who would follow the Mass in a Latin-English Missal were very few indeed.

I think it is significant that the congregation's responses were exactly the same as those given by the altar-boy/acolyte when no congregation was present. Parenthetically we might speculate whether the acolyte was representing the congregation when he made his responses or whether the congregation was merely permitted to join in the responses of the acolyte. The former view accords with modern thinking. I incline, however, to the latter view both because of the history and logic of the Mass.

The point cannot be demonstrated but I am suggesting that although the Mass was *for* all those in attendance and, indeed, for the whole world, the officiating priest was *addressing* his fellow clerics, including, that is, acolytes. Obviously in the prayer before the Preface to the Canon of the Mass (both Tridentine and post-Vatican II) the possible ambiguity in '*Orate fratres . . . Pray brothers that my sacrifice and yours etc.*' permits a radical change in intention without corresponding change of form.

In conclusion, and in the expectation that Dr. Williams's monograph is likely to be read outside the world of academic anthropologists, it seems necessary to make two observations about the anthropological use of the word 'ritual'. I hope I am not being optimistic in saying that today the idea that ritual is a discrete *kind* of human behaviour is recognised as a projection of the western mind. All human action is significant and the more highly that significance is valued, the more likely is it that the action will be precisely laid down and predictable, the less valued the more random.

The second observation may still require some argument for the dualistically minded. Edmund Leach propagated a view (one dare scarcely call it a theory), of 'ritual' to the effect that 'rituals' *do* what 'religions' *say*. Apart from all else one's experience of the economy of human culture would make one doubtful of this easy formulation. Once we pay attention to what people are telling us, the idea that significant acts do what words cannot becomes more and more compelling. What concepts divide only action can join and action alone can sever the logical, analytical, classificatory or other habitual associations of concepts. As Dr. Williams demonstrates, the implementation of nice ideas without regard to their embodiment has unpredictable and irreversible consequences.

I note with no surprise but with regret a statement on the Mass to be found in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in which we are told (section 1343, English Trans: Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1994) that the Eucharist (Mass) has preserved its 'fundamental structure' from the time of the Apostles. This reveals the gap between what I might call the cerebral nature of current ecclesiastical anthropology and the holistic anthropology which Dr. Williams's analysis so powerfully vindicates.

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