

## PAST AND PRESENT IN RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

### CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE SUBJECT

I would like to start by explaining the subject of my paper and the extent of the field it covers. My task is to compare the past and the present in those Catholic churches which use the Latin liturgy; the circumstances of such a comparison have their origin in the regulations governing the liturgy adopted by the Second Vatican Council on 24th January, 1964.

It must, first of all, be stressed that without a thorough understanding of the theological basis of the new liturgy it would be difficult to understand the aim these measures are designed to achieve.

Anyone entering a Catholic church today will immediately notice a number of changes in internal arrangement, some more striking than others. In the centre we see a plain altar, which arouses our attention because it stands in the central axis of the nave, looking towards the congregation.

The altar is now no longer merely the symbol of Christ. It is at the same time the place where the mysteries of the Redemption are to be celebrated. It is there that Christ sacrifices Himself for our sakes, and we partake, in the form of the Easter feast of the New Testament, of the body and blood of Christ in His Glory.

### THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH AS PROVIDED FOR BY THE LITURGICAL REFORM

According to our Catholic conception of things, the resurrected Christ is mysteriously present at the Holy Mass and in the sacraments. The faithful are not merely the imitators of Christ; rather, through their partaking of the mysteries of the liturgy and penetration of those mysteries, are they His brethren. Thus is achieved the vital union between Christ and His worshippers. It is in this sense that St. Paul speaks of the organic unity between head and limbs, using the words "mystical body of Christ" to designate the indestructible community between Christ and those who believe in Him.

The new altar is at once the altar of sacrifice and the table for the Easter feast. This dual character derives from the two factors below.

a) The altar used to stand right at the back of the choir, if possible in the curved bay at the rear. Even in its ancient form of a *mensa* it primarily imitated that of a sarcophagus. It at once symbolized the Christ Who died for our sakes and served to contain the piously

preserved relics of the holy martyrs, thus bearing witness to the fact that the Church had been built on their testimony. Since the 12th century, the tabernacle had been placed on the altar, considered to be the residence, or tabernacle, of God, present in His eucharistic embodiment, though it was also conceived of as the throne of the Christ to Whose spiritual reign we are subject. Divine service tended, in this context, rather to evoke the theocratic image of the Old Testament and recalled the picture of the faithful led out by their priest to the encounter with God.

b) The other important aspect is this. According to the old way of looking at things, the mere fact of attending Holy Mass—which, however, involved adoration, devotion and meditation—constituted all that was demanded of the faithful. The new approach demands, above all, the active participation of the believers, who, together with the priest, offer the holy sacrifice in collaboration with Christ. The texts which accompany the rites are thus in the language of the people; the church is no longer merely a sacred place, but rather the place where the people assemble to hear the Word of God and offer the sacrifice.

### PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES ARISING OUT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LITURGICAL REFORM

Obviously, the liturgical reform deriving from these changes confronts us with obligations which are absolutely new.

1. The first thing we need is a new *mensa* facing the congregation. Meanwhile, the former altar must be removed altogether, or else—in so far as this does not conflict with other principles which we shall be mentioning later—simply deprived of its function.
2. It will not be possible to place the tabernacle on the new *mensa*-altar. The objects for Communion must either be kept on the old altar or in a side chapel, or else on a specially-introduced side table or stand.
3. The spoken liturgy and the Eucharistic liturgy are essentially one (*liturgia verbi, liturgia Eucharistiae*). The former has a place of its own, near the altar, which is the ambo, or "table of the Word of God". The pulpit, which was generally raised and stood in the nave, not far from the chancel arch, thus ceases to be necessary. It need not, however, be removed, if it is of artistic value or historical interest.
4. The new conception of the liturgy makes specific

provision for the principal duties of the priest during the service. One of these is to preside over the celebration of the Eucharist, or Holy Mass. The priest it is who directs the collective participation in the religious rite. It is therefore preferable to provide a seat for him near the altar.

The new approach unquestionably means that we must look seriously into the possible solutions to our new problems. At the outset, all these "modern" demands shocked and appalled, and in the early years there developed two opposite and rival trends: there were those who sought radically to abolish whatever ran counter to the new principles, while the traditionalists were loth to accept the liturgical reform and were prepared to implement it only with the aid of mean objects of doubtful value. It was, of course, no longer possible to maintain the old order; though even today we do not find the new altar absolutely everywhere. The decision had to be made, and there were those who took it hastily, which explains why the initial results were so deplorable. To be perfectly frank, some very regrettable acts of vandalism took place on the one side, while on the other a certain conservatism was to be observed, which, in utter indifference to the arts, refused to entertain the new theological approach.

The point of departure for the Reform adopted by the 2nd Vatican Council is precisely the religious approach, turned, once more, in an inward direction. After the publication of the initial documents on the liturgical reform, the Holy See addressed several warnings to the bishops, the most important of which is, in fact, the most recent in date. This is the letter from the Sacred Congregation of the Clergy to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences, sent out from Rome on 11 April, 1971, the purpose of which was to exhort the clergy as a whole to assume its duty of protecting the historic and artistic heritage of the Church. The following is a brief summary of this ecclesiastical document. Holding the role of the arts in high esteem, the Church (it runs) has most carefully preserved its artistic treasures throughout the centuries. The spiritual leaders of the flock are still today responsible for the care of the sacred buildings and objects; yet despite the warnings of the Holy See, there are so many cases of illicit alienation of property, so many thefts and so much destruction that in some areas the position is becoming almost scandalous. Using the liturgical reform as a pretext, the most out-of-place alterations have been made within the sacred precincts, in keeping neither with the liturgy nor with the protection of historical and artistic treasures. In order to settle this very important question, the Congregation therefore prescribes the following regulations:

The criterion for the selection of a work of art for admission to a church must always be true artistic merit. Ancient work must be properly protected in all places and at all times. It is the responsibility of each diocesan curia to draw up, with the aid of experts, an inventory

of sacred buildings and of objects of artistic or historical value, with a detailed description of each and an indication of its value. Bishops must not fail to ensure that the changes rendered necessary by the liturgical reform are made with great precaution and care and are always in accordance with the norms provided for under that reform. Alterations to works of art and centuries-old treasures may be made only where actually necessary and must not involve damage to such works. Advice must always be sought from the Sacred Art Commissions and from lay experts. Increasingly, there must be compliance with such secular legislation as may be in force in the country regarding the protection of works of art.

Local ordinaries or bishops shall see that sacred places and objects which are of artistic value are made increasingly accessible, especially to tourists.

The above are the main points made in what is an extremely important letter.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION OF THE LITURGY IN HUNGARY AND PROGRESS TO DATE

Owing to the rather traditionalist mentality of the Hungarian Church, there was some delay in the implementation of the liturgical reform. It was only in 1967 that the clergy started to worry about the change in the position of the altar, or rather the institution of the new *mensa*. And even then there were initial incidents, few in number but regrettable enough. It must be frankly admitted that in some cases the ancient altar was sawn up and some of its precious parts were carried off abroad.

Such cases attracted the attention of the National Historical Monuments Board and of the Hungarian Episcopate. In 1968 there was set up the Episcopate Committee of Three, which met twice a year with the head officers of the Board to agree on the lines to be adopted. The following basic principles were established jointly by the two bodies:

1. Churches of historical interest retain their function as places of worship even where they have undergone restoration and a certain number of changes.
2. Where internal changes are made to suit the demands of the liturgical reform, historical and artistic demands must invariably be met.

These two principles were sufficiently in harmony to produce solutions satisfactory to all parties. We no longer remove the old altar or change its place in instances where it has an artistic value. The same applies to pulpits and all permanent furniture. The *mensa* must be modern in shape, and made of wood, stone or marble; imitations of period styles are forbidden, both for the altar and for all permanent furniture. The position of the new altar is determined on a principle established by the two parties; practically speak-

ing, its best place, in a baroque church, is beneath the chancel arch, and care should be taken to avoid placing it too far from this arch in either direction. Where the altar rail shutting off the sanctuary has no historical value it is removed and, by common consent, a place is found for it elsewhere, for example in the same portion of the building as the old altar. Where, however, it cannot conveniently be moved from its original place, we leave it completely alone.

From the experiments we have carried out jointly we have discovered that the arrangement of a place of worship is more harmonious if the new furniture is to a reasonable extent in keeping with the old and if the whole interior is sufficiently furnished to be neither bare nor overcrowded. In our opinion the placing of the new altar and the re-arranging of the sanctuary are always tasks for an architect. The designing and execution of the new altar and its erection within its ancient surroundings—in short, the creation of each object—must always be treated as a specific job on its own. Theoretically, two altars which are identical may be erected only in two identical interiors.

We do our best to simplify the interior of the church as much as possible, to suit the intentions of the new liturgy. Hence flags and similar superfluous objects are in all cases to be removed. Everything liable to distract the attention from the service is removed from the sanctuary or from the area surrounding the altar. Ancient statues to which a degree of artistic value attaches are removed to a different place in the building, sometimes three or four together, or in whole groups, so as completely to free the sanctuary portion of the church, while at the same time enabling the attention of visitors to be drawn to their artistic value. Where possible, or necessary, the walls of the church are repainted in three of four simply contrasted colours. Valuable frescoes or seccoos we invariably restore and preserve, but in some cases we do away with ornamentation and decoration, particularly if it has no special value, leaving the frescoes simply surrounded by harmonious stretches of wall.

#### MODERN WORKS OF ART IN ANCIENT CHURCHES

A frequent question which arises out of the comparison between past and present is whether, and to what extent, modern religious works of art may be introduced into ancient churches. The only guiding principle is that the church must retain its practical function as a place of worship. But the logical consequence of such a principle is precisely that it must admit modern works of art in keeping with the taste of our age which are born of a deeply-felt religious inspiration. The Church must continue, as always, to encourage and satisfy contemporary artistic trends; for man of our day is indeed fully entitled to express his religious feelings



Fig. 1. — Tereske: Gothic church dating from 1290. Following complete restoration of the crypt, an altar in the modern manner facing the congregation was set up there in 1968.

and to seek artistic expression for his religious ideas. There is nothing more just and more desirable than that sacred works of art, including the new altar and other permanent furniture, should be contemporary in style, as concrete embodiments of the present-day artist's most profound intuitions.

All of the Council's instructions regarding sacred art provide valuable guidance in this field. At the same time, the positive results of the campaign undertaken jointly with the administrators and conservation specialists from the Historical Monuments Board encourage us to remove imitations in the way of statues, pictures, vases, etc., and anything else in our churches which has become superfluous and in the way.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the 2nd Vatican Council contains an important paragraph on religious art. This runs: "The Church has always been a patron of the visual arts, and has always desired the objects used in Divine worship to be decorative and beautiful, so as to be a worthy reflection of transcendental things and ideas and truly symbolize them. However, the Church has always permitted changes in

the forms and materials used for decoration, especially where the passing of time has led to developments in artists' technique and in the taste of the public" (122) "No style of any historical period has ever been considered as the official style of the Church. The Church has always accepted the formal expression peculiar to each age, which corresponded to the characteristic features and way of life of the population, or to the requirements of particular rites. Thus it always most carefully preserved the works of art accumulated over the centuries. Within the Church there must be freedom for the contemporary arts—those of the peoples and countries of our day".

My personal opinion is that the fight against imitations is a special task and mission of our age. With the passing of time a great deal of trash has been brought into our churches. Progress in the implementation of the liturgical reform means the commissioning of new works of art, the repainting of churches and the renewal

of their furniture; this is the moment to remove—with all due tact—objects which are no longer in their place in a church. One of the problems facing the Hungarian church—and the churches of Europe in general, I believe—is the invasion of church buildings during the last hundred years by poor-quality mass-produced goods, valueless manufactured objects and poor imitations of statues and paintings. The imitation work of art—generally mass-produced—can inspire no profound thought; all such manufactured objects are devoid of content and hence of any message for us. But the problem of bric-à-brac in our churches is not purely an aesthetic one; it is of vital importance theologically. The interior of a present-day church demands simplicity, originality and sincerity. It should be recalled that the lay authorities are making enormous efforts to do away with the imitations and educate public taste. The Church has undertaken to apply itself ambitiously and with absolute devotion to this same task.

Fig. 1. — Nagybörzsöny: 12th century Gothic church, restored eight years ago. The medieval side-table was recently rediscovered. The restoration work was carried out in cooperation with the Historical Monuments Board.



To sum up all we have said so far, we should say that, in connection with the solution of these problems, the cooperation established between the churches and the National Historical Monuments Board has been excellent. The fruit of this cooperation is our joint work entitled: "The Conservation of Religious Buildings and Works of Art", which appeared in 1971. This is the product of the joint efforts of experts, engineers, architects, archaeologists, art historians, artists and designers on the one side and of theologians and priests on the other. Their cooperation, mutual understanding and mutual esteem and the feeling of responsibility for the preservation of a heritage common to both parties have led to an extraordinary interchange of ideas and opinions which in the last five years has produced excellent results. The effectiveness of this cooperation will increase still further in the future; an important contribution is the very substantial financial assistance provided by the Government of the People's Republic of Hungary for the protection, restoration and reconstruction of religious buildings.

The book is important in that its purpose is to teach, inform and educate. It has already been circulated to all parish libraries irrespectively of denomination. For the layman, or rather the admirer or owner of any work of art, it will provide enlightenment on all matters relating to conservation and restoration, i.e. archaeological research and excavations, surveying, design, applications to the authorities, and technical problems connected with building, flooring, walls, roofing, etc. Separate sections are devoted to such problems as drainage, plasterings, interior and exterior painting, the designing and installation of ventilation systems, etc., and there is even discussion of such present-day technological questions as heating, ventilation, lighting and acoustics. Subjects more specifically relating to conservation include scientific training, the art of stone-carving and problems connected with paintings and statues. In an Appendix are to be found a few questions of detail relating to the creation of the environment, the church grounds and gardening.

The second part of the book is intended purely for theologians, and in it specialists of all three denominations provide excellent descriptions of the present situa-

tion and of the principles underlying the present-day position of the churches and of their liturgy. The beneficial effect of this work of ours is already being felt everywhere.

## CONCLUSIONS

The 2nd Vatican Council substantially deepened our conception of the Church and sought, primarily through the vehicle of liturgical experience, to bring greater simplicity into the attitude of the Christian at the most profound levels of his religious feelings. Today the Church sets out to be no more than the religion, or worship, of God and the institution founded by Christ in the service of all. It aspires to be the Church of the Poor rather than that of the rich, the Church of the destitute, of men who suffer, of those who desire and seek justice and peace, not the church of the inebriated. One wonders whether the Church, with all the obligations it has assumed in the service of men who are sincere and simple-minded, is not in a sense in contradiction with itself when it takes on the gestures of a Maecenas of another age and, despite its modest means, opens its doors to artists. We do not think it is. Even if the Church can no longer be a patron who pays with golden ducats, it can still continue to welcome works of art which reflect the humanism, the gigantic struggles and the profound transformations of our present age and ask to be accepted into it. If we see the Church in this light, it will reveal itself, notwithstanding its present-day desire to belong primarily to the poor, as something rich, a constant promoter of great cultures, not by reason of its wealth but because it has always inspired, patronized and welcomed the works of art of each period and contrived to preserve them. If it is true that the Church has succeeded in looking after half at least of the European artistic heritage over the centuries, we may hope and trust that it will consider the conservation of that heritage as one of its most important future tasks as well, and will complete and enrich it with further creations born of the eternal artistic inspiration of man.

Bishop CZERHATI

## PASSE ET PRESENT DANS LES EDIFICES ECCLESIASTIQUES

*Le II<sup>e</sup> Concile du Vatican a sensiblement modifié notre conception de l'Eglise. Il a cherché à simplifier l'attitude du chrétien et à approfondir ses sentiments religieux les plus authentiques, grâce surtout à sa participation à la liturgie. Aujourd'hui, l'Eglise ne veut plus s'occuper que de la religion et du culte divin. Elle est l'institution fondée par le Christ au service de chacun. Elle veut être*

*l'Eglise des pauvres plutôt que celle des riches, l'Eglise des indigents, des hommes qui souffrent, de ceux qui désirent et qui demandent la justice et la paix et non pas l'Eglise des rassasiés.*

*On peut alors se demander si l'Eglise, qui doit assumer de lourdes obligations au service des hommes sincères et simples, n'est pas en contradiction avec Elle-même*

*lorsque, reprenant les gestes des mécènes d'autrefois mais avec une bourse plus modeste, Elle ouvre les portes des églises aux artistes? Nous pensons que non. Même si l'Eglise ne peut plus être le mécène fastueux qui payait en pièces d'or, Elle doit continuer à susciter et à conserver des œuvres d'art, qui reflèteront l'humanisme, les luttes gigantesques et les transformations profondes de notre époque. Sous cet aspect, l'Eglise, qui veut appartenir aux pauvres d'aujourd'hui, nous apparaîtra riche encore, non pas en raison de son argent, mais de son rôle culturel, parce qu'Elle a toujours, au cours des âges, inspiré, patronné, accueilli des œuvres d'art et qu'Elle a su les conserver.*

*Puisqu'Elle a pu susciter et conserver au long des siècles des constructions et des œuvres d'art qui représentent près de la moitié du patrimoine artistique de l'Europe,*

*nous avons le ferme espoir et la confiance qu'Elle considérera que leur conservation doit être l'une de ses préoccupations majeures à l'avenir et qu'elle saura compléter et enrichir ce patrimoine de créations nouvelles, nées de l'inspiration artistique éternelle de l'homme.*

*Fig. 1. — Tereske: église gothique de 1290. En 1968, un autel en face, avec un aménagement moderne, fut installé dans sa crypte parfaitement restaurée.*

*Fig. 2. — Nagyörzsöny: église gothique du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, restaurée il y a huit ans. Le pastophorium médiéval fut retrouvé depuis peu. La restauration de l'église fut réalisée en collaboration avec l'Office des Monuments Historiques.*