

VON HILDEBRAND ON THE MERITS OF THE LATIN MASS

I (PJC) am often drawn into conversations regarding the merits of the new Ordinary Form and the old Extraordinary Form of Holy Mass; being a centrist neither an old form or new form radical or holder of strong views, I have taken some salient points from an article by *Dietrich von Hildebrand* (I guess slanted toward my personal attitudes to reverence of the Divinity) for your consideration. The highlights are mine.

*I have been involved in the Liturgy of Holy Mass for 70yrs, 40yrs of post-Vatican II, during which I was deeply involved in planning and implementing the freedoms of the new vernacular liturgy. In 2008 I re-joined Holy Mass in the old form (Latin) here in Kelmscott. I have now concluded that the lack of Liturgical Instruction has led to a range of biases toward the 'the old-fashioned liturgy', as it is often referred to, particularly by the older generation many of whom often resented the strictures of the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church, expressed in the teachings of Holy Church.

The link to the whole article follows <http://www.catholic-pages.com/mass/hildebrand.asp>

Dietrich von Hildebrand, was one of the world's most eminent Christian philosophers. A professor at Fordham University, Pope Pius XII called him 'the 20th Century Doctor of the Church'. He is the author of many books, including Transformation in Christ and Liturgy and Personality.

When St. Bonaventure writes in *Itinerium Mentis ad Deum*, that only a man of desire (such as Daniel) can understand God, he means that a certain attitude of soul must be achieved in order to understand the world of God, into which HE wants to lead us.

This counsel is especially applicable to the Church's liturgy. The *sursum corda* - the lifting up of our hearts - is the first requirement for real participation in the mass. Nothing could better obstruct the confrontation of man with God than the notion that we "go unto the altar of God" as we would go to a pleasant, relaxing social gathering. This is why the Latin mass with Gregorian chant, which raises us up to a sacred atmosphere, is vastly superior to a vernacular mass with popular songs, which leaves us in a profane, merely natural atmosphere.

The basic error of most of the innovations is to imagine that the new liturgy brings the holy sacrifice of the mass nearer to the faithful, that shorn of its old rituals the mass now enters into the substance of our lives. For the question is whether we better meet Christ in the mass by soaring up to Him, or by dragging Him down into our own pedestrian, workaday world. The innovators would replace holy intimacy with Christ by an unbecoming familiarity. The new liturgy actually threatens to frustrate the confrontation with Christ, for it discourages reverence in the face of mystery, precludes awe, and all but extinguishes a sense of sacredness. What really matters, surely, is not whether the faithful feel at home at mass, but whether they are drawn out of their ordinary lives into the world of Christ - whether their attitude is the response of ultimate reverence: whether they are imbued with the reality of Christ.

THOSE WHO RHAPSODIZE on the new liturgy make much of the point that over the years the mass had lost its communal character and had become an occasion for individualistic worship. The new vernacular mass, they insist, restores the sense of community by replacing private devotions with community participation. Yet they forget that there are different levels and kinds of communion with other persons. The level and nature of a community experience is determined by the theme of the communion, the name or cause in which men are gathered. The higher the good which the theme represents, and which binds men together, the more sublime and deeper is the communion. The ethos and nature of a community experience in the case of a great national emergency is obviously radically different from the community experience of a cocktail party. And of course, the most striking differences in communities will be found between the community whose theme is supernatural and the one whose theme is merely natural. The actualization of men's souls who are truly touched by Christ is the basis of a unique community, a sacred communion, one whose quality is incomparably more sublime than that of any natural community. The authenticity of communion of the faithful, which the liturgy of Holy Thursday expresses so well in the words *congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*, 'we've gathered together the love of Christ', is only possible as a fruit of the I-Thou communion with Christ Himself. Only a direct relation to the God-Man can actualize this sacred union among the faithful.

The depersonalizing "we experience" is a perverse theory of community.

The communion in Christ has nothing of the self-assertion found in natural communities. It breathes of the Redemption. It liberates men from all self-centeredness. Yet such a communion emphatically does not depersonalize the individual; far from dissolving the person into the cosmic, pantheistic swoon so often commended to us these days, it actualizes the person's true self in a unique way. In the community of Christ, the conflict between person and community that is present in all natural communities cannot exist. So this sacred community experience is really at war with the depersonalizing 'we-experience' found in mass assemblies and popular gatherings which tend to absorb and evaporate the individual.

This communion in Christ that was so fully alive in the early Christian centuries, that all the saints entered into, that found a matchless expression in the liturgy is now under attack - this communion has never regarded the individual person as a mere segment of the community, or as an instrument to serve it. In this connection it is worth noting that totalitarian ideology is not alone in sacrificing the individual to the collective; some of Teilhard de Chardin's cosmic ideas, for instance, imply the same collectivistic sacrifice. Teilhard subordinates the individual and his sanctification to the supposed development of humanity. At a time when this perverse theory of community is embraced even by many Catholics, there are plainly urgent reasons for vigorously insisting on the sacred character of the true communion in Christ.

I submit that the new liturgy must be judged by this test: **Does it contribute to the authentic sacred community?** Granted, that it strives for a community character; but is this the character desired? Is it a communion grounded in recollection, contemplation and reverence? Which of the two -- the new mass, or the Latin mass with the Gregorian chant evokes these attitudes of soul more effectively, and thus permits the deeper and truer communion? **Is it not plain** that frequently the community character of the new mass is purely profane, that, as with other social gatherings, its blend of casual relaxation and bustling activity precludes a reverent, contemplative confrontation with Christ and with the ineffable mystery of the Eucharist?

Many such article can be found in the world of Dr Google.

When considering 'the bustling activity' of one Mass vs the Other, consideration for other members of the congregation seems to have gone out the window. A reflection of today's society values?

PJC