

Sacrilege

an editorial by Msgr. Richard J Schuler in the Winter 1994 issue of *Sacred Music*.

As a pastor, I can truly say that nothing in the last 25 years has driven Catholics away from the Church more than the abuses of the liturgy that they have been forced to endure. Some have stopped practicing their religion; others have transferred to other parishes where they could find something that more nearly approaches the reverence and dignity that they sought in their relationship with their Creator, the Father Almighty; still others have left the Church...

In the past, the Latin language, the altar *ad orientem*, the ceremonies and rubrics of the old missal, all established and assured the existence of dignity, reverence and sanctity when they were carefully observed. Which came first: the loss of reverence or the loss of faith? Only God knows, but the faithful detected it and chose to look elsewhere or stop looking.

It is time that we admit that the liturgical renewal of the late twentieth century has not been a success. Granted that many changes have been good. But the overall result has been a disaster of enormous magnitude. To prove this, one need only cite the horrendous statistics on Sunday Mass attendance, a phenomenon experienced as far away as Australia (see the results of a recent survey in the Archdiocese of Sydney). Ask any parish priest about the frequency of confession among his people, brought on by the prevalence of general absolution. The ignorance of the basics of the faith is staggering even in the face of the widely-hailed new form of scriptural homily which replaced the old instructional sermon. What our young people don't know about Catholicism and what the older generation has forgotten is truly remarkable. And yet we were assured that the new liturgy would provide everyone with a deeper knowledge of the liturgical rites, the doctrines of the faith, the liturgical year, and indeed all that was wanted and a pastor could hope for.

The liberal camp has brought about a catastrophe in all forms of Catholic worship: funerals, weddings, Sunday Masses, school Masses, even great ecclesiastical occasions. One is embarrassed, often ashamed at the inferior music, the attitude of jest

and amusement, the casual treatment of even the most holy elements. This is the same liberal establishment that ruined catechetics, the religious orders, seminaries and vocations to the priesthood, the beauty of our churches, in a word, the faith of our people. How many people have been robbed of their parish church by incompetent and ignorant architectural consultants who have been nothing more than twentieth century iconoclasts? In every area, the liberal element has destroyed what centuries of Catholic life have passed along as the great ecclesiastical arts: music, sculpture, painting, architecture, gold and silver work, church bells, bookbinding, incense and stained glass, to mention only a few of the Catholic things that have been lost. And along with their loss, came the loss of faith that these sacramentals sustained in our Catholic people.

But the loss is not only in the great art or the sacramentals used in God's worship. Now comes the ridicule of the past and the attack on the holy, even the holy of holies itself. A recent convention held in Bismarck, North Dakota, was reported in the journal, *Pastoral Music* (October-November 1994), along with photographs of exhibits at the meeting. On page 24, a picture of "Five Decades of Liturgical Music" has a figure dressed in a dalmatic (a deacon's vestment mistaken here to be a chasuble by the perpetrator of the exhibit), wearing a biretta while he offers Mass from a missal placed on the wrong side of the altar, and flanked by candelabra and the American and papal flags. There is a server dressed in cassock and surplice. Nearby, with a poster announcing that they are standing in a choir loft, a group of singers, holding rosaries, is singing, directed by a nun in long black habit, showing what these people thought was going on in our churches before the "liberation" we are now so happily experiencing. The reform banished such ridiculous things as the old Mass!

Such ignorance displays a lack of faith and a poorly veiled hatred of the sacred, particularly the Mass as celebrated from the earlier Roman missal. Can it be based in a deep recognition of the fact that the so-called Tridentine ritual was an enormous means of grace and the true source of the spiritual life of millions for centuries?

Sacred Music is published quarterly. The editor, Msgr. Richard J. Schuler, may be contacted at 548 Lafond Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55103.