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The Mass is the Medium: Marshall McLuhan and Roman Catholic Liturgical Change

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

I have crossed the paths of many wonderful people in my life, but one in particular changed the direction of my life forever. This piece of work is dedicated to my Godfather, Alberto De Simoni.

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ABSTRACT

The liturgical changes of Vatican II sought to bring a period of renewal to the Catholic laity by encouraging active participation and making the Mass more simple to understand. However, the time after the Council was characterized by confusion and disengagement by the laity. I will be discussing three significant changes to the liturgy at this time, The change from Latin to the vernacular, the change in the orientation of the altar and priest, and the change in acoustics, sound, and music. I will be examining all of these changes through the media theory of Marshall McLuhan, famous for coining the phrase, “the medium is the message”. By doing this, I will argue that the liturgical changes of Vatican II had the unintended consequence of undermining the sacredness of the Mass. I will begin by giving a brief overview of Vatican II and the proposed liturgical change and then give an introduction to Marshall McLuhan’s media theory. After this I will write about Latin as a medium, the position of the altar and priest as a medium, and acoustics, sound, and music as a medium. By doing this, my aim is to show how changing these traditions of Catholic liturgy had a desacralizing effect on the laity.

CHAPTER ONE: VATICAN II AND THE MASS

The Roman Catholic Church, like the rest of the world, went through a very turbulent time in the 20th century. Two World Wars fought with new weapons and technologies had caused catastrophic damage to the Earth and left millions dead. Soviet Communism was crushing Christianity in Eastern Europe. Once fervently Catholic nations such as Spain were abandoning the Church for secular and atheistic ideas. Her power and influence had been gradually fading in the Western world for quite some time and this process only seemed to be speeding up in the 20th century. The Church needed to address her place in the modern world and figure out how to most effectively communicate with the outside world. The Second Vatican was called to address this.

In Pope John XXIII's opening speech he said "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously".¹ The Council sought to do this, not by harsh condemnations as it did in the past, but through open dialogue and encounters with the outside world. This was seen in *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration of Religious Freedom), the Catholic-Orthodox Declaration, and *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism). But what changed the lived experiences of lay Catholics the most were the changes made to the liturgy.

The liturgy the Church celebrated before Vatican II was called the Tridentine Mass (also known as the Latin Mass). This Mass was codified by Pope Pius V during the Council of Trent. The Council of Trent as a whole, and the liturgical changes by Pope Pius V were responding to

¹ Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 713

the Protestant threat, which had severely weakened the Church's power and influence in European society. Adrian Fortescue writes:

The Protestant Reformers naturally played havoc with the old liturgy. It was throughout the expression of the very idea (the Real Presence, Eucharistic Sacrifice, and so on) they rejected. So they substituted for it new communion services that expressed their principles but, of course, broke away utterly from all historic liturgical evolution. The Council of Trent (1545 - 1563), in opposition to the anarchy of these new services, wished the Roman Mass to be celebrated uniformly everywhere. The medieval local uses had lasted long enough. They had become very florid and exuberant; and their variety caused confusion.²

Leading up to Vatican II, there was a movement of priests and theologians in the Church that sought liturgical renewal. It became known as the Liturgical Movement. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak describe it as thus:

...this Movement aimed at transcending what it called the rubricism or the preceding century with its fussiness and rigidity and its demand for uniformity. This Movement, too, turned back to the early Church with a view to restoring venerable ways and putting an end to the countless later additions, a work of learned dust removal that occupied many monasteries. The Movement also attempted to derive from all this work a theology of prayer... Finally, this Movement made an effort to change passive believers into active participants, both by emphasising the principal rites at the expense of the others and by explaining them and even celebrating them in the language of the people.³

The ideal of active participation was the driving force behind all of the Liturgical Movement's aims and all the changes to the liturgy made in the Second Vatican Council. The most prominent changes were that the New Order of the Mass, the *Novus Ordo* was now in the vernacular instead of Latin, the priest turned around to face the faithful instead facing the altar and tabernacle, and the change in acoustics, sound, and music. These changes were monumental, never in Catholic history were there liturgical changes of this magnitude. Naturally, there were mixed feelings about these changes from the laity. Mario Von Galli writes, "Never was a council

² Michael Davies, *A Short History of the Roman Mass* (Rockford, Ill: Tan Books and Publisher, 1997), 35-36

³ Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 73

so variously judged as the Second Vatican Council. Some speak of a turn to the secular; others express a boundless disappointment. These are the two extremes, and between them there is a many-runged ladder of every gradation of black and white. The darkest judgements are, interestingly enough, found primarily among well-educated Roman Catholics”.⁴ The topic of these liturgical changes are a polarizing one. Progressives often accuse traditionalists of being stuck in the past and traditionalists often accuse progressives of undermining the faith.

Another way to interpret the event of Vatican II is through the media theory of Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan’s views can be summarized by his phrase, “the medium is the message”. What he meant by this phrase was that “... any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology”.⁵ In Catholicism, the sacraments and the Church herself are God’s media, the message is Jesus Christ. The Church has always understood that this message must be transmitted in a reverent and worthy manner. But by changing the medium in which this message was transmitted, there were unintended changes to the message. These changes in some ways robbed the Mass of certain powerful psychological effects it previously had on the laity. The use of Latin, the celebration of Mass towards the altar and tabernacle by the priest, and the use of silence and Gregorian chant in the Mass all served a purpose in communicating certain truths about the liturgy and the Catholic faith as a whole. A popular Catholic axiom is *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which translates to “the rule of prayer is the rule of belief”.⁶ By drastically changing the Mass, the Church’s greatest prayer, the beliefs of many Catholics changed as well. My thesis is that the application of the liturgical changes of Vatican II; specifically the use of the vernacular, the

⁴ Mario von Galli, *The Council and the Future* (Lucerne: C.J. Bucher Ltd., 1966), 8

⁵ Marshall McLuhan and W. Terrence Gordon, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2015), 19

⁶ Michael Fiedrowicz, Rose Pfeifer, *The Traditional Mass* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2020), 301

change in direction and space of the priest and altar, and the change in acoustics, sound, and music had the unintended consequence of undermining the sacredness of the Mass. In order to do this I will explore these changes in the Mass through Marshall McLuhan's communication theory.

CHAPTER TWO:

MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S THEORY OF COMMUNICATION

*Because the present is always a period of painful change, every generation views the world in the past.*⁷

Marshall McLuhan, the father of media ecology, is best known for one phrase, “The medium is the message”. What he meant is by this witty aphorism is that new media technologies transform societies, and in turn transform their inhabitants. The specific content transmitted by media is far less important than the totality of effects caused by media. In his massive volume *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*, he writes, “...the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs”.⁸ McLuhan gives the example of the radio, “What is the content of the radio program? That’s what we think is the message, the direct and obvious effect of the radio, which we believe to be the most important thing. However, the content isn’t the message. The real message is all the secondary effects produced by the services and disservices that the medium demands”.⁹ To McLuhan, all media are extensions of the human person, specifically extensions of the five senses; smell, taste, touch, hearing, and sight. Clothes are an extension of the skin, cars and bicycles are extensions of the foot, and glasses are an extension of the eye. McLuhan differentiated mediums as being either hot or cool. It is important to note that hot and cool are relative terms to one another. Hot media are low in participation and cool media are high in

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, Bruce Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), viii

⁸ McLuhan and Gordon, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, 20

⁹ Marshall McLuhan, Eric McLuhan, Jacek Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 101-102

participation. “A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition’. A cartoon is ‘low definition’, simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information”.¹⁰

McLuhan’s ideas are best communicated in his book, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. It is a summary of his much longer and in depth, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. It is a short book, but it expresses the nature of his ideas in ways that no regular formatted book could. The book is full of pictures, photographs, comics, optical illusions, and newspaper snippets. The fonts range from tiny to massive, in some places a sentence is dragged out across two whole pages. It shows, instead of tells, how human perception is influenced by different modes of communication. Close to the beginning of the book he quotes A. N. Whitehead, “The major advances in civilizations all but wreck the societies in which they occur”.¹¹ These major advances in civilizations are oftentimes the introduction of new media into the world, which in turn extends mankind. Read Mercer Schuchardt notes:

McLuhan’s most famous aphorism, “the medium is the message,”... was derived from Harold Innis’s work, *The Bias of Communication* (1951), in which Dr. Innis pointed out the relative time- or space-bias of a medium based on whether it was materially composed of stone or papyrus, the former being heavy and non-transportable (and thus lending itself to duration through time but not distribution through space), and the latter being light and portable (and thus lending itself to distribution through space but not duration through time thanks to its fragility).¹²

The tools humans create naturally reshape the entire structure of societies, especially newly created modes of communication. McLuhan began his history of communication with the

¹⁰ McLuhan and Gordon, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, 39

¹¹ Jerome Agel, Quentin Fiore, Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam, 1967), 6-7

¹² Read Mercer Schuchardt “The Medium is the Messiah: McLuhan’s Religion and its Relationship to His Media Theory,” *Second Nature*, last modified, April 1, 2013, accessed February 15, 2020. <https://secondnaturejournal.com/the-medium-is-the-messiah-mcluhans-religion-and-its-relationship-to-his-media-theory/>

creation of the phonetic alphabet by the Greeks. He had this to say about previous writing systems and their relation to the phonetic alphabet:

To sum up, pictographic and hieroglyphic writing as used in Babylonian, Mayan, and Chinese cultures represents an extension of the visual sense for storing and expediting access to human experience. All of these forms give pictorial expression to oral meanings. As such, they approximate the animated cartoon and are extremely unwieldy, requiring many signs for the infinity of data and operations of social action. In contrast, the phonetic alphabet, by a few letters only, was able to encompass all languages. Such an achievement, however, involved the separation of both signs and sounds from their semantic and dramatic meanings. No other system of writing had accomplished this feat.¹³

The writing forms of these ancient cultures involved seeing pictures in their scripts. Reading words had an element of deciphering pictures. This was not the case with the phonetic alphabet. Letters correspond to sounds. Written words in phonetic languages correspond to how the words sound spoken aloud, while pictographic and hieroglyphic writing correspond to how the thing the word refers to is seen with the eye in reality. The phonetic alphabet therefore emphasizes the internal word rather than the external. Derrick De Kerckhove builds on McLuhan:

...the invention of letters for vowel sounds in the consonantic scripts borrowed by the Greek from the semitic tribes brought about a completely new access to language. It seems that whereas the forms of writing preceding the truly phonetic alphabet were committed to support memory, the new phonetic variety introduced the possibility of changing the nature of the information, thus enabling writers and readers to invent new information rather than being satisfied with assimilating established knowledge.

Technically speaking, the phonetic alphabet was much more than an information storage system, it was an information-processing system. How was it different from the older semitic forms? It was different because the use of fixed letters for the sound of vowels made it possible to read any Greek manuscript without any previous knowledge of its content, a thing which is impossible, even to this day, when you read the Koran or the Talmud in their original script forms. This is much more important than it sounds at first hearing, because it means that writing could now be detached from the process of communicating meaning. In other words, with the Greek alphabet and all its derivatives,

¹³ McLuhan and Gordon, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, 124

you could begin to manipulate meaning, not only by manipulating the listener as you could have in any oral communication, but at a distance, so to speak, from your study or your cell, simply by manipulating the system of signs which you were using to create the meaning.

The most devastating consequence of this development is that communication would one day become secondary to the production of a well-ordered meaning. Even as it gradually displaced the center of gravity of all communications from human interactions to textual production, the phonetic alphabet turned oral speech into an art form which was called rhetoric. Throwing a net on speaking and analyzing its various components to select only those which could produce desensorialized meaning, the alphabet's fundamental drive was to reduce live speech to silence. But the silencing of communication was not possible until script-form had reached sufficient uniformity to be read conveniently in silence. It is print which fostered silent reading. Reading became a private experience inviting retreat and solitude instead of community oriented activities; and ultimately silent reading began to change the very shape of thinking from an activity still tied to the senses to an experience abstracted from environmental contact and based almost exclusively on representations.¹⁴

With the phonetic alphabet, man began to detribalize. The beginning of the written word was the beginning of the individual. In antiquity and medieval times, writing was done by scribes. It was a laborious process, and thus texts could not exist in large quantities. Western man was not yet fully literate at this point, only the educated class could read which was much smaller than those who were illiterate. Throughout the Middle Ages, manuscripts in Western Europe were largely preserved, translated, and written by Roman Catholic monks. At this point, the West was still largely acoustic. The major media shift that caused society to be turned upside down was the invention of the printing press. The printing press rendered the old process of hand writing manuscripts obsolete almost overnight. Mass distributions of the texts eventually made mass literacy possible. The printing press was in fact essential for producing the cause as well as the mindset of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Derrick De Kerchhove, "Passion and Precision: The Faith of Marshall McLuhan," *Second Nature*, last modified, March 31, 2014, accessed February 17, 2021. <https://secondnaturejournal.com/passion-and-precision-the-faith-of-marshall-mcluhan/>

¹⁵ Read Mercer Schuchardt, "The Reformation as Media Event", *Second Nature*, last modified October 31, 2017, accessed February 9, 2021. <https://secondnaturejournal.com/reformation-media-event-full-essay/>

Ever since the printing press and mass literacy, mankind has been moving from acoustic space to visual space. Acoustic space envelops all the senses, especially hearing. Stimulation comes from all areas at once simultaneously. This is the space of tribal man, of simply existing in nature. McLuhan writes:

The ear favors no particular “point of view”. We are enveloped by sound. It forms a seamless web around us. We say, “Music shall fill the air”. We never say, “Music shall fill a particular segment of the air”.

We hear sounds from everywhere, without ever having to focus. Sounds come from “above”, from “below”, from in “front” of us, from “behind” us from our “right”, from our “left”. We can’t shut out sound automatically. We simply are not equipped with earlids. Where a visual space is an organized continuum of a uniformed connected kind, the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships.¹⁶

Visual space is not all encompassing like acoustic space. It follows a linear pattern. This is due to the nature of the printed word. The eye only sees what is in front of it. It does not see up, down, left, right, and behind like the ear can hear. Visual space is thus fragmented in a way in which acoustic space is not. Visual space also gives the viewer a fixed point of view, which has an individualizing effect. Western man became visual with the printing press and the printed word. Since print is an extension of the eye, it has a chronological and fragmented nature. This gave the West a visual bias. McLuhan, an English professor, had an immense knowledge of classical and modern literature. He was a lover of books, yet at times it seemed like he was against reading. Mark Stahlman answers, “He wasn't against reading; he was against the visual bias that came with the printing press. He was against the inability to recognize the developing patterns that were caused by print. And, through his incessant ‘probes’, non-stop reading and

¹⁶ Agel, Fiore, McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*, 112

voluminous correspondence, he was looking for others who understood what causes the world we all live in”.¹⁷

McLuhan used the terms “visual” and “acoustic” alongside the terms *figure* and *ground* from Gestalt psychology, and “right hemisphere” and “left hemisphere” from neuroscience. He writes, “In Gestalt, reality presents itself to the mind as a *figure* detaching itself from a *ground*. We notice the *figure* first and most often it dominates our whole field of consciousness. However, the ground is at least as important and often is even more important, especially in the areas that concern us”.¹⁸ McLuhan identified that the left hemisphere of the human brain pertained to the eye and the right hemisphere pertained to the ear. The left hemisphere dealt with visual, speech, and verbal awareness, it was quantitative. The right hemisphere dealt with tactile, spatial, musical, and acoustic awareness, it was qualitative.¹⁹

McLuhan saw that 20th century man was starting to lose his visual character and was becoming acoustic again just as man was before the printing press. The new revolution changing the world was the electric revolution. The radio instantly transmitted sounds across the globe. The television too instantly transmitted sound *and* images. The effects of these media were tremendous. Mankind was becoming tribal again. In the electric age, one could see and hear events that were happening in real time all over the world. People were no longer just reading about events after the fact. The entire world was connected through electricity, there was no longer any separation between people. This is what McLuhan dubbed “The Global Village” in his book of the same name. The Global Village is an electric world. The electric connectedness

¹⁷ Mark D. Stahlman, “The place of Marshall McLuhan in the learning of his times., “Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature, last modified September 22, 2011, retried February 20, 2021.

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+place+of+Marshall+McLuhan+in+the+learning+of+his+times.-a0280004549>

¹⁸ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 101-102

¹⁹ McLuhan, Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, 54

of mankind makes it so that there is a closeness brought between people who are thousands of miles away. McLuhan was not a moralist, but he saw great dangers in the new acoustic electric world.

What may emerge as the most important insight of the twenty-first century is that **man was not designed to live at the speed of light**. Without the counterbalance or natural and physical laws, the new video-related media will make man implode upon himself. As he sits in the informational control room, whether at home or at work, receiving data at enormous speeds - imagistic, sound, or tactile - from all areas of the world, the results could be dangerously inflating and schizophrenic. His body will remain in one place but his mind will float out into the electronic void, being everywhere at one in the data bank.

Discarnate man is as weightless as an astronaut but can move much faster. He loses his sense of private identity because electronic perceptions are not related to place. Caught up in the hybrid energy released by video technologies, he will be presented with a chimerical “reality” that involves all his senses at a distended pitch, a condition as addictive as any known drug. The mind, as figure, sinks back into ground and drifts somewhere between dream and fantasy”.²⁰

The Global Village is not a very friendly place. Neither were tribal societies. McLuhan uses the terms “discarnate” and “angelism” interchangeably in his writing. Angels have no bodies, they are pure spirits. In the electric age, man is living through cyberspace, through screens, through a world that is not physical. McLuhan was not around to see video games, social media, or virtual reality, but none of these would surprise him in the slightest. These are simply more advanced versions of the electronic media that preceded them. The Global Village is a Gnostic Village. But McLuhan was no Gnostic. In fact, he belonged to an organization that strongly opposed Gnosticism, the Roman Catholic Church.

McLuhan was not always a Catholic. He was raised in a nominally Protestant family in Manitoba, Canada. He first became interested in Catholicism when he encountered the work of GK Chesterton. He converted shortly after. Here is his own account:

²⁰ Ibid, 97.

I had no religious belief at the time I began to study Catholicism. I was brought up in the Baptist, Methodist, and Anglican churches. We went to all of them. But I didn't believe anything. I did set to find out, and literally to research the matter, and I discovered fairly soon that a thing has to be tested on its own terms. You can't test anything in science or in any part of the world except on its own terms or you will get the wrong answers.

The church has a very basic requirement or set of terms, namely that you get down on your knees and ask for the truth... I prayed to God the Father for two or three years, simply saying "Show me". I didn't want proof of anything. I didn't know what I was going to be shown because I didn't believe in anything.

I was shown very suddenly. It didn't happen in any expected way. It came instantly as immediate evidence, and without any question of its being a divine intervention... Wham! I became a Catholic the next day.²¹

Eric McLuhan explains his father's understanding of faith, "To a Catholic, faith is not simply an act of the mind, that is, a matter of ideology or thought (concepts) or belief or trust, although it is usually mistaken for these things. Faith is a mode of perception, a sense like sight or hearing or touch and as real and actual as these, but a spiritual rather than a bodily sense".²²

In the majority of Marshall McLuhan's work, he did not explicitly make any theological claims or state that he was Catholic. However, his Catholic faith influenced every area of his thought. In an interview with Pierre Babin, he once said "In Jesus Christ, there is no distance or separation between the medium and the message: it is the one case where we can say that the medium and the message are fully one and the same".²³ Catholicism teaches that God makes us holy through sacraments, physical signs of invisible realities. The fact that these physical signs such as bread, water, and wine used to transmit grace are vital to understanding McLuhan's full analysis of communication and human societies. Catholicism is a very incarnational religion, it fully embraces the physical, the material. Robert A. Orsi in his book *History and Presence*,

²¹ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, xvii

²² Ibid, xv.

²³ Ibid, 103.

broadly generalizes the defining principle of Catholicism as *presence*²⁴, an allusion to the Catholic doctrine of the real presence in the Eucharist. This Catholic presence is most notably found in the Catholic Mass where the body, blood, soul, and divinity become present on the altar when the priest consecrates the Eucharist.²⁵

Eric McLuhan, like his father, observed that the Mass was a mode of communication. He observed that the Tridentine Mass was designed according to the classical five divisions of rhetoric.

The first of these was *inventio*, which consisted of techniques of inventing or discovering material. The second division, *dispositio*, involved the manner of laying out an oration, the sequential disposition or arrangement of its material. *Elocutio*, the third division and the heart of the enterprise, governed all aspects of a rhetor's activities. It determined what would be selected from *inventio* and how that matter would be disposed. As regards the choice of ornament and style, it guided the use of figures—schemes and tropes—to fine-tune the material. It decided all aspects of delivery—inflection, gestures, etc. *E-loqui*, meaning speaking out or eloquent utterance, was the discipline of putting-on and putting together harmoniously the audience and its sensibilities, the occasion, and the desired effect: the sensibilities form a direct route to the mode of being of the audience and also to changing it. Under the fourth division, *memoria*, were gathered various memory techniques; and the fifth division, *pronuntiatio* or *actio*, was the reservoir of vocal delivery and techniques of stagecraft, the “delivery system” by means of which the entire *logos* had its impact.

Subsequent to St. Thomas, the Tridentine Mass was deliberately shaped using the five divisions of rhetoric: the first two divisions structure the first part of the Mass, “The Mass of the Catechumens”; in the remaining “Mass of the Faithful,” the Offertory, Canon, and Communion perform the functions of *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *delivery*. The Mass, of course, is a single complex prayer.²⁶

Jonathan Robert Cowans describes the Latin Mass this way:

In the Mass, the principal liturgy of the medieval Church, all five human senses were engaged - and heightened - by the media ecology of the rite: the lofty Gothic

²⁴ Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Ma: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 4

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 1413.

²⁶ Eric McLuhan, “St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication”, *McLuhan Studies: Issue 6*, last modified 2000, accessed January 7, 2021, http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/mcluhan-studies/v1_iss6/1_6art2.htm

architecture, the mystical voices of the choir, the chanting of the sacred ministers, the colorful clerical vestments, the clouds of fragrant incense, the choreographed ritual in the sanctuary, even the taste of the consecrated host. In addition, the presence of relics, images, statues, stained glass, and lighted candles within the church intensified the multi-media, multi-sensorial spectacle being performed before the congregation as it waited expectantly for the priest to pronounce the sacred words that transformed the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. The verbal portions of the Mass – all delivered in Latin - were indeed extensive, but they were of little value to lay worshippers, who heard, but, for the most part, could not understand the sacred language. Such an experience would be analogous to present-day moviegoers watching a foreign film without the benefit of subtitles; the general plot-line could perhaps be followed but little or none of the dialogue meaningfully understood. In both instances, the senses would be fully engaged, less so the intellect.²⁷

The call for active participation was a call for the engagement of the intellect of the laity in worship. Before Vatican II, especially in the Middle Ages, the Mass was not a place where the faithful simply sat down and listened. The priest was muttering Latin at the altar and laity were up and about doing all kinds of things, especially if the church was a large cathedral. Some could kneel at a side altar and pray the rosary, others could walk around to the various statues to touch them, and some would be lighting candles. Everyone stopped and kneeled when the bells rang at the consecration and afterwards went right back to their devotions. This is something that Vatican II sought to put an end to. Instead of having individuals pray by themselves, Vatican II envisioned all the faithful to act together in harmony with their senses and intellect.

Alcuin Reid, O.S.B. considers, “The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*... used *actuosa participatio*, which when translated ‘actual participation’ is less misleading than the usual English rendering ‘active participation’.

This underlines that the participation in the liturgical rites and prayers is primarily through mind

²⁷ Jonathan Robert Cowans, “And the Word Was Made Print: The Reformation Bible as a Mass Medium” (117), ResearchGate, last modified May 2019, accessed March 7, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jonathan-Cowans/publication/335224543_And_the_Word_Was_Made_Print_The_Reformation_Bible_as_a_Mass_Medium/inks/5d5c269d299bf1b97cf99718/And-the-Word-Was-Made-Print-The-Reformation-Bible-as-a-Mass-Medium.pdf

and heart and secondary through external action”.²⁸ McLuhan saw these changes and immediately recognized that the “... Catholic hierarchy is completely dominated by the left side of the brain. Vatican II was a very poor attempt to pass from right to left side”.²⁹ Eric agrees with his father, “Vatican II had clearly been a response to the pressure exerted by television on the general population”.³⁰

²⁸ Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy*, 64

²⁹ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 53

³⁰ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 174

CHAPTER THREE:

THE LANGUAGE OF THE MASS AS A MEDIUM

Until electricity, technology fragmented... When men began to build cities or towers, a technology of bricks - as in Babel - (it) fragmented mankind.³¹

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.³²

This is the Biblical account of how the world came to speak many languages. All humanity had the ability to communicate with each other until their hubris resulted in God confusing their speech and scattering them. The many languages of Earth are a direct result of sin. When men tried to climb to the heavens, they were struck down. However, mankind now is more capable than the architects in the Tower of Babel. "After the Apollo astronauts had revolved around the moon's surface in December of 1968, they assembled a television camera and focused it on the earth. All of us who were watching had an enormous reflexive response.

³¹ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 57

³² Gen 11:1-9 RSVCE

We ‘outered’ and ‘innered’ at the same time. We were on earth and the moon simultaneously. And it was our individual recognition of that event which gave it meaning”.³³

Of course the heaven Apollo visited was what we call outer space, not the Heaven of eternal life. But during the Roman Catholic Mass worshippers are simultaneously on Earth and in Heaven. They are also outside of time, as the Mass is the sacrifice at Calvary transmitted and represented through time on every Roman Catholic altar. In the Mass, mankind is not being scattered and confused like he was at Babel, but rather brought together as the Mystical Body of Christ on the way to Heaven. The Mass is an anti-Babel, as it has been celebrated in Latin, a sacred language for the majority of Western Christendom. The three sacred languages of the Catholic Church are Hebrew, Greek, and Latin as they were the languages that were used to mock Jesus on the cross as “King of the Jews”.³⁴

[Thus God is praised in three languages, namely Hebrew, which by law is the mother of all languages; Greek, which is the teacher; and Latin, which is the empress, on account of the dominion of the Roman Empire and the Papacy]. Latin, like Hebrew and Greek, is one of the holy languages of Christian worship, but it also plays a specific role in the history of the Church. Just as Hebrew is the mother and Greek the teacher, so Latin is the empress of all by virtue of the hegemony of the Roman Empire and of its heir, the papacy.³⁵

The honor ascribed to these holy languages is a clever measure against the lowliness of all other languages. Catholic tradition affirms that God wrote the Old Testament through the patriarchs and prophets, the New Testament through the Apostles, and the Latin Vulgate through St. Jerome. God granted the Law of Moses to the Jews through Hebrew, philosophy to the Greeks in their language, and a vast empire to the Latin speaking Romans.

³³ McLuhan, Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, 54

³⁴ John 19:20 RSVCE

³⁵ Ryan Szpiech, *Latin as a Language of Authoritative Tradition*, accessed February 14, 2021. https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/ryanszpiech/wp-content/uploads/sites/88/2014/05/szpiech.chapter.Oxford.Handbook.Latin_Authority-libre.pdf (65)

McLuhan agrees with the conception of these sacred languages and cultures. He says “The cradle of the Church was Greco-Roman literacy, and this was Providentially designed, not humanly planned”³⁶ and “I don’t think it was accidental that Christianity began in Greco-Roman culture. I don’t think that Christ would have suffered under Ghengis Khan with the same meaning as under Pontius Pilate. The Greeks had invented a medium, the phonetic alphabet, which... made it possible for men to have for the first time in human history a sense of private identity”.³⁷ The Church esteems these sacred languages because it is these languages and their cultures which have shaped her throughout the ages. It is interesting to note that Latin is not the only language used in the Latin Mass. The *Kyrie* is Greek and the *Alleluia* is Hebrew, thus the three sacred languages of the Church are used in its liturgy.

The use of a sacred language was familiar to first century Jews. According to Michael Fiedrowicz:

At the time of Christ, the Jews used the language of Old Hebraic for their services, though it was incomprehensible to the people. In the synagogues, only the readings and a few prayers relating to them were written in the mother tongue of Aramaic; the great, established prayer texts were recited in Hebrew... Insofar as the Passover Meal was primarily celebrated with Hebrew prayers, the Last Supper was also characterized by elements of a sacred language. It is therefore possible that Christ also spoke the words of Eucharistic consecration in the Hebrew *lingua sacra*.³⁸

Catholic tradition recognizes the Last Supper as the first Mass and if Fiedrowicz’s assessment is correct, the very first Mass indeed was characterized by the use of a sacred language. The use of the sacred language Latin, has quite a variety of benefits for the Catholic Church. It is a medium with a very clear and resounding message. Pope John XXIII wrote *Veterum Sapientia* just eight months before calling the Second Vatican Council. The purpose of

³⁶ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 60

³⁷ Ibid, 80.

³⁸ Fiedrowitz, *The Traditional Mass*, 141

this encyclical by the Pope who oversaw Vatican II was to promote the study of Latin! He begins this document,

The wisdom of the ancient world, enshrined in Greek and Roman literature, and the truly memorable teaching of ancient peoples, served, surely, to herald the dawn of the Gospel... The Church has ever held the literary evidences of this wisdom in the highest esteem. She values especially the Greek and Latin languages in which wisdom itself is cloaked, as it were, in a vesture of gold... But amid this variety of languages a primary place must surely be given to that language which had its origins in *Latium*, and later proved so admirable a means for the spreading of Christianity throughout the West... Of its very nature Latin is most suitable for promoting every form of culture among peoples. It gives rise to no jealousies. It does not favor any one nation, but presents itself with equal impartiality to all and is equally acceptable to all.³⁹

Here, Pope John XXIII acknowledges the contributions of Greek and Roman culture to the world in antiquity and says that the intellectual accomplishments of these cultures paved the way for the message of Jesus Christ to be more readily understood and spread. He lists three major reasons why Latin is an effective mode of communication by the Church, that it is universal, immutable, and non-vernacular. He says, “Since every Church must assemble round the Roman Church... it seems particularly desirable that the instrument of mutual communication be uniform and universal, especially between the Apostolic See and the Churches which use the same Latin rite”.⁴⁰ According to traditionalists, the universality of the Catholic Church is most easily seen in its uniformity of worship. Before the liturgical changes of Vatican II, you could go to a Roman Catholic Mass anywhere in the world, from Japan to Chile, and it would be exactly the same. The language, the prayers, the actions of the laity and the priests would be very familiar. There would be no differences in the rubrics of the Mass at home or abroad for a traveling Catholic. This is a great advantage as:

A uniform liturgical language is capable not only of representing the unity of the Church across peoples, races and languages, but also of preserving and promoting it...

³⁹ John XXIII, *Veterum Sapientia*, accessed February 20, 2021.
<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/john23/j23veterum.htm>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Latin language of worship does not simply manifest and produce the unity of the Church that crosses over regions in the present age. Linguistic unity possesses not only a synchronic dimension, but also a diachronic one, since the community of believers spans not only physical space, but also time... Latin, as the language of worship, creates a time-transcending unity, as it binds together countless generations of supplicants from a multitude of ages, from over one and a half thousand years, into one common language. The faithful of the twenty-first century pray to God with the same words with which Christians of late antiquity and of the Middle Ages have prayed to God.⁴¹

To pray in the same language as Catholics thousands of miles away and thousands of years ago is a powerful sign of unity in the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a sign of consistency in a vast and global church.

A second advantage of liturgical Latin is its immutability. Pope John XXIII observes, “Modern languages are liable to change, and no single one of them is superior to the others in authority. Thus if the truths of the Catholic Church were entrusted to an unspecified number of them, the meaning of these truths, varied as they are, would not be manifested to everyone with sufficient clarity and precision”.⁴² Since Latin is a dead language, its grammar and vocabulary are set in stone. The definition of words and phrases in Latin do not change over time. In contrast, vernacular languages constantly change over the years. The Latin in the Mass is the same Latin that was used 400 years ago, yet the vernacular English 400 years ago was much different than English that is spoken today. Even English is spoken in many different ways in many different places in today’s world. Since language changes so much, innocuous words can transform into obscenities or slurs in just a few years. This is not a worry for rites that have fully retained their sacred language. An unchanging liturgical language signals unchanging doctrine. Alterations in language give an unconscious message that the Faith itself could change. This is part of the reason why conservative Catholics flock to the Latin Mass, it communicates

⁴¹ Fiedrowicz, *The Traditional Mass*, 159-160

⁴² John XXIII, *Veterum Sapientia*, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/john23/j23veterum.htm>

orthodoxy by virtue of its language. It also offers stability, while the *Novus Ordo* sometimes fails to. There is no need to constantly update and rewrite parts of the liturgy. For example, “While the collect for the feast of Corpus Christi experienced no changes for more than five hundred years, in the last thirty years there have been six different versions in the new Italian Missals”.⁴³ Liturgical Latin is therefore a weapon against corruptibility and unites believers of all generations. The remark of McLuhan rings true, “Engraving in stone is for the priests; they have an affinity for spanning eras”.⁴⁴

The final reason is that Latin is non-vernacular. Simply put, Latin is not a language that we speak in everyday life. The use of a sacred language signifies that the event worshippers partake in is one of far more importance than their daily routines. A sacred language is used in the Mass because it is a sacred event. “Finally, the Catholic Church has a dignity far surpassing that of every merely human society, for it was founded by Christ the Lord. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the language it uses should be noble, majestic, and non-vernacular”.⁴⁵ An immediate objection to this is that Latin was once the vernacular in much of Christendom. But this is not quite the case. “The Latin of the liturgy was identical with neither the classical Latin of Cicero nor the colloquial language, Vulgar Latin. It was, at least in the texts of prayers, a highly stylized form of language, which was not readily understandable to the average Roman of the fourth and fifth centuries: ‘No Roman had ever spoken in the language or style of the Canon or the prayers of the Roman Mass’”.⁴⁶ An ancient and non-vernacular language signifies the ancient and venerable character of the ritual.

⁴³ Fiedrowicz, *The Traditional Mass*, 163

⁴⁴ McLuhan, Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, 136

⁴⁵ John XXIII, *Veterum Sapientia*, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/john23/j23veterum.htm>

⁴⁶ Fiedrowicz, *The Traditional Mass*, 158

Vatican II was not the first time in Christendom that called for a vernacular liturgy. It was a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation. Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin had vernacular worship as an essential part of their vision for a better Christianity. This was the first large scale movement of vernacular worship within Christendom. Coincidentally, it was also a time of massive denominational schisms. McLuhan asserts, “You might imagine that the demand for a vernacular liturgy arose spontaneously in the sixteenth century, but it wasn’t so. In fact, that demand was linked to the invention of print, an invention that accentuated people’s need to push towards individualism and nationalism... Under Protestant reform, liturgy split into a variety of new forms, each group with its own point of view. With it the sects appeared”.⁴⁷ McLuhan hints at mass literacy and vernacular worship as being prone to disagreements and fighting. The vernacular separates people on an ethno-linguistic basis, which can lead to sectarianism and conflict with others. The Reformation took root in Northern Europe, where the vernacular languages were not based in Latin like Southern Europeans ones. When *sola scriptura* took root in Europe, it was a prioritizing of literacy over oral tradition. Read Mercer Schuchardt says that “The Protestant Reformation was, among other things, a reader’s revolution... And reading killed hearing, culturally speaking, just as surely as video killed the radio star”. McLuhan notes “For the Catholic, the revealed Word of God is not the Gutenberg Bible, not the King James Version. But the Protestant cannot but take a different view of the passing of the pre-eminence of the printed book, because Protestantism was born with printing and seems to be passing with it”.⁴⁸ McLuhan states,

...faith communicates, not so much by transmitting concepts or theories, but by inner transformation of people; not by expressing a *figure* but by participating in the *ground* of secondary effects that transform life. For a vernacular, used liturgically, to be able to play this transforming role, it would have to be truly popular. However, this

⁴⁷ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 142

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 163.

demand points to one of the most traumatic developments of recent liturgical reform: I mean the intrusion of bureaucratic processes into Catholic communities. Of course, the Eucharistic liturgy is now offered in the vernacular, but it is in the hands of commissions whose contact with language has all the frigidity of the computer. Minus the oral dimension of popular idioms and rhythms, the vernacular risks becoming a vacant lot and a spiritual desert.⁴⁹

Of course people can understand their vernacular language, but not even the greatest mystic or holiest saint completely understands what is happening at the Mass. The Mass is beyond human comprehension, it is essentially a taste of Heaven. Latin is a dead language, but it is precisely because of that fact that it communicates the sacredness of the sacrifice on the altar effectively. Using the vernacular in the Mass risks communicating that the Mass is like any other event one attends in their life. Perhaps the vernacular tricks the laity into arrogantly thinking that they can wholly understand the mysteries of the Mass.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 145.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE DIRECTION OF PRIEST AND ALTAR AS A MEDIUM

Introibo ad altare Dei. The Latin Mass begins with these words which translate to “I will go unto the altar of God” which are taken from Psalm 42. These prayers at the foot of the altar are absent from the *Novus Ordo*. In both rites throughout the Mass, the celebrant kisses the altar. This is to show great respect to it as it is the place where Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary becomes present again. The Catechism of the Council of Trent states:

We therefore confess that the Sacrifice of the Mass is and ought to be considered one and the same Sacrifice as that of the cross, for the victim is one and the same, namely, Christ our Lord, who offered Himself, once only, a bloody Sacrifice on the altar of the cross. The bloody and unbloody victim are not two, but one victim only, whose Sacrifice is daily renewed in the Eucharist, in obedience to the command of our Lord: Do this for a commemoration of me. The priest is also one and the same, Christ the Lord; for the ministers who offer Sacrifice, consecrate the holy mysteries, not in their own person, but in that of Christ, as the words of consecration itself show, for the priest does not say: This is the body of Christ, but, This is my body; and thus, acting in the Person of Christ the Lord, he changes the substance of the bread and wine into the true substance of His body and blood.⁵⁰

Christ is therefore truly present in the Mass, in the consecrated bread and wine and in the priest who Christ is working through. The priest, just like the consecrated bread and wine are visible signs of the invisible reality of Christ penetrating into human existence. Mircea Eliade writes that “Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the actualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, in the beginning”.⁵¹ This is true of the Mass where Christ’s sacrifice becomes an “eternal mythical present”.⁵² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) notes, “...in the Christian liturgy we not only receive something from

⁵⁰ John A. McHugh, Charles J. Callan, “*The Catechism of the Council of Trent*”, 1923, accessed March 4, 2021. <http://www.saintsbooks.net/books/The%20Roman%20Catechism.pdf>

⁵¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), 68-69

⁵² *Ibid*, 70.

the past but become contemporaries with what lies at the foundation of that liturgy. Here is the real heart and true grandeur of the celebration of the Eucharist, which is more, much more than a meal. In the Eucharist we are caught up and made contemporary with the Paschal Mystery of Christ, in his passing from the tabernacle of the transitory to the presence and sight of God”.⁵³

One of the biggest changes in the liturgy after Vatican II was celebration of Mass *versus populum* (towards the people) instead of *ad orientem* (towards the East). Traditionally, the altar was attached to the tabernacle where the consecrated Eucharist lay in reserve. In order to have the priest facing the people, the altar had to be removed from the tabernacle and there had to be space in between them for the priest to stand and face the people. In the majority of the Latin Mass, the Priest is facing the same direction as the laity, with his back turned to them. According to Michael Fiedrowicz, the celebration of Mass *ad orientem*,

is among the great constants in the history of the classical rite of the Mass. For almost 1,900 years the celebrant looked eastward at the altar - not turned *away* from the assembled people, but rather turned *towards* the Lord, in collaboration with them. This positioning of the officiant is in no way specific to the Christian cult, but is rather a constant in the history of religion as well... It was similar in the Temple of Jerusalem. Here, too, the priest stood before the great altar of burnt offerings in the temple court at the presentation of the victim, whereby his gaze was directed toward the Holy of Holies in the inner temple, the place that was considered to be the dwelling of the Most High. When offering a sacrifice, the person always turned himself towards the one to whom he offered the sacrifice, not those for whom or with whom he offered it.⁵⁴

In both forms of the Mass, there is a prayer called the *Orate Fratres*. “Pray brethren, that my sacrifice and yours be acceptable to God, the almighty Father”.⁵⁵ Here we see that the prayers of the Mass recognize the priesthood of the laity! The priest is not the only one offering a sacrifice, the faithful assist him and offer his sacrifice with him. The Catholic notion of the

⁵³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 57

⁵⁴ Michael Fiedrowitz, *The Traditional Mass*, 141

⁵⁵ “A Comparison Between the Texts of the Traditional Missal and the New Missal of 2011”. Accessed February 12, 2021. <https://lms.org.uk/missals>

priesthood of the faithful differs from Luther's "priesthood of all believers" in the distinction it makes between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood. *Lumen Gentium*, a principal document of Vatican II says this about the priesthood:

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.⁵⁶

The priest is offering the sacrifice on behalf of the people, but the people help him and are part of that sacrifice as well! In the Mass, all the Church is working together to reach the Lord. The ministerial priest is leading a group of priests to the Father. Therefore, it makes sense that the priest and the congregation travel together in the same direction. Why is this direction east? Part of the reason is that our origins in Eden lie to the east, as does our destination in the New Jerusalem. St. John Damascene gives this explanation:

It is not without reason or by chance that we worship towards the East... Since God is spiritual light and Christ in sacred Scripture is called "Sun of Justice" (Mal 4:2) and "Orient" (Lk 1:78), the east should be dedicated to His worship... Also, the divine David says: 'Sing to God, ye kingdoms of the earth: sing ye to the Lord; who mounteth above the heaven of heavens, to the east' (Ps 67:33f). And still again, Scripture says: "And the Lord has planted a paradise in Eden to the east; wherein He placed man whom He had formed", and whom he cast out, when he had transgressed, 'and made him to live over against the paradise of pleasure (Gen 2:8; 3,24 LXX), or in the west. Thus it is that, when we worship God, we long for our ancient fatherland and gaze toward it... As a matter of fact, when the Lord was crucified, He looked toward the west, and so we worship gazing toward Him. And when He was taken up, He ascended to the east and thus the Apostles worshiped Him and thus He shall come in the same way as they had seen Him going into heaven (cf. Acts 1:11), as the Lord Himself said: "As lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth even into the west: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Mt 24:27). And so, while we are awaiting Him, we worship toward the

⁵⁶3. Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 21 November, 1964," in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), sec. 10

east. This is, moreover, the unwritten tradition of the Apostles, for they have handed many things down to us unwritten.⁵⁷

When the tabernacle and altar were separated, this naturally changed the aesthetics of the sanctuary. Traditional high altars of a Roman Catholic church are usually ornate, sometimes having artwork of angels and saints around them, representing the mystical reality that all the angels and saints are present at every Mass adoring the Lord. Many churches after Vatican II installed new altars which were much less ornate than their old ones. Some of them had no decor at all other than the mandatory two candles, and even then the candles could sometimes be next to the altar and not on it. Many looked cheap and out of place and yet they were rapidly displacing traditional altars. The time immediately succeeding Vatican II has been compared by some traditionalists to the period of intense iconoclasm following the Reformation.

Traditionalists sometimes deem these changes as “wreckovations”, renovations which wrecked the beauty of a church. Altar rails were stripped down and painting and statues were often removed. The most important place in the Mass, the altar, often looked plain and out of place. In order to make these changes, the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God, where the consecrated Eucharist lies was separated from the altar. In some churches the tabernacle became almost hidden and cast to the side, residing somewhere not prominent in the wall of the building. In 1956 in a liturgical congress in Assisi, Pope Pius XII, knowing the wishes of some theologians stated, “To separate tabernacle from altar is to separate two things which by their origin and nature should remain united”.⁵⁸ Separating the two would send a message that the two are not related. But Christ in the tabernacle and Christ made present on the altar during Mass are the same Christ. This sacrificial and Christocentric character of the Mass becomes distorted when

⁵⁷ Fiedrowitz, *The Traditional Mass*, 144-145

⁵⁸ Michael Davies, *The Catholic Sanctuary and the Second Vatican Council* (Rockford, Ill: Tan Books and Publishers, Inc., 1997), 31-32

they are separated and the priest has his back towards Christ in the tabernacle. Traditionalists sometimes disparagingly refer to these new altars as “Cranmer tables”, comparing the liturgical changes after Vatican II to the principles of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, a highly influential figure in the English Reformation. “St. Richard Gwyn, a Welsh teacher and father of six children who was executed in 1584 for recusancy (refusal to attend Protestant services), looked upon the desecrated sanctuaries of Wales and remarked with sadness... ‘In place of an altar, there is a miserable table’”.⁵⁹ The replacement of high altars with “miserable tables” in Reformation England bears some resemblance to the changes to many Catholic altars after Vatican II.

It is astounding that in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, there is absolutely nowhere that mandates the separation of the altar and tabernacle! In fact, it is not even suggested!

Eucharisticum Mysterium, a document closely related to Vatican II, which was concerned with Eucharistic piety, states “Above all, the main altar should be so placed and constructed that it is always seen to be the sign of Christ Himself, the place at which the saving mysteries are carried out, and the center of the assembly, to which the greatest reverence is due” and “The Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a solid, inviolable tabernacle in the middle of the main altar or on a secondary altar, but in a truly prominent place. Alternatively, according to legitimate customs and in individual cases to be decided by the local Ordinary, it may be placed in some other part of the church which is really worthy and properly equipped”.⁶⁰ This document gives honor to the tabernacle and altar, but the practice of parish liturgists after Vatican II had a deep desacralizing effect.

⁵⁹Ibid, 42.

⁶⁰Eucharisticum Mysterium - Instruction on Eucharistic Worship 1967. <https://adoremus.org/1967/05/eucharisticum-mysterium/>

Marshall McLuhan was extremely critical of *versus populum* celebration of Mass. He writes:

The current liturgical practice of having the priest face the congregation rather than the altar is a complex question which is greatly complicated by architecture. To face the congregation in a small space, or in a round space, has a quite different effect from facing the congregation in a Gothic nave. The strong visual and perspective stress of the Gothic nave creates remoteness and detachment of a special kind... however, when the celebrant turns to the audience he is putting them on as his corporate dignity or mask, just as when he turns to the altar he is putting on the divine mask of supernatural power. A continuous confrontation of the audience by the celebrant reduces the occasion to the merely humanistic one. A Catholic priest, in this regard, possesses no more power or mystery than a Protestant padre. "Putting on" only the congregation as his corporate mask of dignity deprives the celebrant of any compelling power or charisma.⁶¹

Ratzinger agrees with McLuhan:

Now the priest... becomes the real point of reference for the whole liturgy. Everything depends on him. We have to see him, to respond to him, to be involved with what he is doing. His creativity sustains the whole thing. Not surprisingly, people try to reduce this newly created role by assigning all kinds of liturgical functions to different individuals and entrusting the 'creative' planning of the liturgy to groups of people who like to, and are supposed to, 'make their own contribution'. Less and less is God in the picture. More and more important is what is done by human beings who meet here and do not like to subject themselves to a 'pre-determined pattern'. The turning of the priest towards the people has turned the community into a self-enclosed circle. In its outward form, it no longer opens out on what lies ahead and above, but is closed in on itself. The common turning toward the east was not a 'celebration toward the wall'; it did not mean that the priest 'had his back to the people': the priest himself was not regarded as so important.⁶²

When you are in a vehicle traveling to a destination, you generally look in the same direction as the vehicle's operator. On a plane, you face the same direction as the pilot. In a car, you face the same direction as the driver. On a sailboat, you look forward alongside whoever is steering. You walk in the same direction as a guide up a mountain. When you are going somewhere, the driver or leader is *ad orientem*. The Church is also a vehicle with a destination. She is the Ark of Salvation, and her goal is to take the entire world to Heaven. Just as Noah's

⁶¹ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 135

⁶² Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 80

Ark saved his family from death, the Catholic Church saves souls from eternal death. In the Mass, the entire congregation on a journey to Jesus. But when you watch television or use the computer, you are looking towards someone. The electric age is the age of *versus populum*. The electric age has turned us all into spectators. The Mass has turned into something that Catholics watch instead of something Catholics pray. During the coronavirus pandemic, public Mass was halted for some time in much of the world. Many parishes started to post videos and livestream Mass. Churches were empty other than the priest and perhaps somebody operating the camera. In the vast majority of videos, the priest would be facing the camera as if he was a talk show host or news reporter. His back would be to the only person in the room, Jesus Christ, in the tabernacle.

CHAPTER FIVE:

ACOUSTICS, SOUND, AND MUSIC AS A MEDIUM

One of the most unique things about the Tridentine Mass in relation to Eastern liturgies is the fact that much of it is completely silent. The Low Mass was almost entirely silent, there was no singing, and the priest inaudibly prayed at the altar where two candles were lit. This was in contrast to a High Mass where six candles are lit on the altar and the *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* are all sung either in Gregorian chant or polyphony. The High Mass also has a large amount of silence in it, but not as much as the Low Mass. This distinction between Low Mass and High Mass was not made during Vatican II, there is no equivalent of the Low Mass in the *Novus Ordo*. This is largely because of the Council's call for active participation. The best way to get the laity involved in the Mass is to have them sing.

Prior to the Council, American Catholicism largely had a Low Mass culture. The primary reason for this is because American Catholicism is largely Irish Catholicism. Thomas Day, in his hilarious and insightful *Why Catholics Can't Sing* writes:

To be Irish is to be ever conscious of a history of tears and oppression. From the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, the Catholic Irish were the most systematically and ruthlessly suppressed people in the Western part of Europe... During that period, a priest - someone who had the same status as a criminal - would go down to the hedge in the fields or perhaps set up a makeshift altar in a barn to celebrate an illegal Mass. The faithful would come from miles around to attend. Their presence at this religious ceremony represented both an act of genuine devotion and also of political defiance. Under the circumstances, singing was risky... A rural and even nomadic people who lived in tribes and clans, most of the Irish did not settle down in villages with parish churches until relatively late in their history. The earliest Christian chapels in Ireland were tiny stone huts that could accommodate a priest or two. The Mass took place within the little oratory and the people stood outside, presumably in silence... During the worst years of British domination, the Catholic Irish were, for the most part, reduced to abject

poverty, taxed heavily, and given no room for private identity. They were also cut off from artistic and cultural developments in the Roman Catholic parts of Europe.⁶³

Thus, any artistic, cultural, and musical developments that happened in continental European music was not felt in Ireland. Irish American Catholics were often disgusted by the cultural and musical expressions of other Catholics in the United States. This led to some intra-Catholic fighting, a fascinating topic which is far too complicated to explain in depth here. The main takeaway is that American Catholic music is largely influenced by its Irish history.

Shortly before Vatican II, a new technology began to be used in the Mass, the microphone. The mike was a tool which was used at baseball games, concerts, and lectures. Using it in the Latin Mass was quite strange. You had a priest facing the altar, not facing the people muttering in a dead language now amplifying his quiet prayer with the mike. It made little sense. Earlier, I said that *versus populum* worship giving the impression that the priest is speaking *to* the laity and not *for* them. The microphone in the Mass does the same. The use of the microphone, the turning around of the priest and separation of the altar, and the abandonment of Latin are all interconnected. McLuhan says,

Many people will lament the disappearance of the Latin Mass from the Catholic church without realizing that it was a victim of the microphone on the altar. It is not practical to say Latin into a microphone since the mike sharpens and intensifies the sounds of Latin to a meaningless degree. That is, Latin is really a very cool form of verbal delivery in which mutter and murmur play a large role, whereas the mike does not take kindly to humming indistinctly. Another effect of the mike at the altar has been to turn the celebrant around to face the congregation. By the same token, amplifiers which are placed in the church to create sounds from all directions at once make the church architecturally obsolete. In a word, the mike makes worshippers demand an intimate and small group of participants. On the other hand, the microphone, which makes it so easy for a speaker to be heard by many, also forbids him to exhort or be vehement. The mike is indeed a cool medium.⁶⁴

Michael O'Connor elaborates:

⁶³ Thomas Day. *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013), 19-20

⁶⁴ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 111-112

McLuhan clearly believes that the Mass in its essence is an example of a cool medium: its content is repetitive, non-linear, multi-voiced; it uses typology, symbol, allusion, parable, and silence. He claims that there is more scope for audience participation in a cool medium. Participation for McLuhan is “completion by the audience” (UM, 23). A hot medium, because it is high-definition, and more highly-organized, leaves less scope for completion by the audience. This might strike us as odd: that the old mass, which was in a language that very few people understood and was celebrated much of the time out of the direct sight and hearing of the congregation, was potentially more participative than the new mass, celebrated in the vernacular with the priest directly engaging the congregation, audibly and visibly. The new mass was designed precisely to foster participation... This is only a paradox, McLuhan explains to Fr Babin, if we have the wrong idea of what matters most. We must not be “hypnotised” by content (ML 147), but must instead attend to the context, the wider, deeper reality of what is going on (i.e., ground rather than figure).⁶⁵

There is a sharp auditory contrast between a Mass with and without a microphone.

Traditionally the voice of the priest came from the altar and from the altar alone. Now his voice comes from every angle of the church at once. This disrupts the focus of the laity and obscures the importance of the altar. The mike forces the laity into listening to every word the priest says. It was necessary that the priest turned around and adopted the vernacular because the new electric conditions of the Mass forced the laity into needing to know what was going on. McLuhan observes “Electric information devices... are causing a very serious dilemma between our claim to privacy and the community’s need to know”.⁶⁶ The electric revolution has ripped down the previous walls of privacy. Photography allows tabloids to follow celebrities wherever they go to document them. News stations on television show us what is going on everywhere in the world simultaneously. Social media tells us what our friends eat for dinner and how they feel every single day. In the preface to *The Medium and the Light*, Eric McLuhan, Marshall’s son, summarizes his father’s positions as “... the use of microphones on the altar would destroy the

⁶⁵ Michael O’Connor, “McLuhan on Microphones in Church,” Academia, 2012. Accessed February, 25, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/11170570/McLuhan_on_Microphones_in_Church_2012_

⁶⁶ Agel, Fiore, McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, 12

psychology of the Latin rite: it would signal the replacement of sacral prayer with pedagogic conversation”.⁶⁷

Kevin White in his article *Drop the Mic*, explains that, “From the point of view of the human sensorium, the Mass is first of all an event in the dimension of sound, the sound of the human voice. Mass is said to be something said by a priest, and the faithful were said to hear Mass... The notion of hearing Mass has since been displaced by the ideal of active participation at Mass, and to be active, it is thought, means to produce, as well as attend to, sound”.⁶⁸ The overamplification of the Mass has led to a desacralizing effect where the way the priest talks is the same way radio hosts or supermarket managers speak on the intercom. The microphone violated sacred space.

In the Latin Mass, the priest says absolutely nothing outside of the rubrics besides the sermon. In the *Novus Ordo*, priests often make friendly remarks, jokes, and comments during the Mass. Thomas Day gives this example of what he calls “deritualization”:

A congregation has assembled for Sunday Mass. The opening hymn begins with a grand flourish. The celebrant processes into the church amid alleluias and mighty blasts from the organ or electric guitars. The music ends. We have reached a mini-climax. Then there is a moment of silence while the celebrant adjusts his microphone. He smiles. And what are the first words out of his mouth? “Good morning, everybody”. THUD! Something has collapsed... the laity in the pews *short-circuits* when greeted this way at Mass. The church building, the music, and the celebrant in flowing robes seem to say, “This is a ritual, an event out of the ordinary”. Then ‘Good morning’ intrudes on it and indicates that this is really a business meeting after all.⁶⁹

Another consequence of the mike was that it affected the type of music in the liturgy. The most prominent form of singing in the Roman liturgy until this point was Gregorian chant and the prominent instrument used was the organ - the king of instruments. Gregorian chant is

⁶⁷ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, xxiii

⁶⁸ Kevin White, “Drop the Mic”, *First Things*, December 2012, accessed February 12. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/12/drop-the-mic>

⁶⁹ Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, 39

immediately recognizable as something distinctly Catholic, even to those who know little about Christianity. K. Marie Stolba describes Gregorian chant as “... purely functional music designed to enhance the worship service and is objective and impersonal... chant is monophonic and modal. It is usually sung in a flexible rhythm without regular accentuation or beat because, as written, no fixed temporal values are specified for the notes”.⁷⁰ This music does not rile up the listener into passionate emotions, but rather provides a type of silence which is most conducive to a contemplative mindset. Gregorian chant belongs wholly to the Church, it was fashioned and shaped by her to be used in liturgies. Fiedrowicz describes Gregorian chant as having “a sacred character in its essence... The texts of Gregorian chant are formed almost exclusively from Sacred Scripture. Plainchant is almost ‘a Bible in music’”.⁷¹

Gregorian chant needs no mike. Churches were traditionally built with acoustics in mind. The human voice has a sort of natural amplification in a basilica. Mikes in churches with traditional architecture are almost unbearably loud. Day recalls “I once attended a liturgy and found myself almost in pain from the sound of bright, clear, intense amplification. The celebrant’s voice - a bishop - was the biggest thing in the building. It was everywhere”.⁷² Gregorian chant is the opposite of this, it sounds strange to say, but it is a sound of silence. A sound perhaps like the “sound of sheer silence” Elijah heard when God called him from the cave.⁷³

Following Vatican II, Gregorian chant largely disappeared from many churches. This is despite *Sacrosanctum Concilium* speaking highly of it. “The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be

⁷⁰ K, Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998), 29

⁷¹ Michael Fiedrowicz, *The Traditional Mass*, 183-184

⁷² Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, 125

⁷³ 1 Kings 19:11-13 RSVCE

given pride of place in liturgical services”.⁷⁴ Much of the music that replaced it was reliant on electronic amplification, electric guitars or a soprano loudly aided by a mike, singing a responsorial Psalm. This type of amplification often makes the Mass feel like concert or performance, instead of a place of prayer. Perhaps a problem with active participation is that it conflicts with interior silence.

Gregorian chant, while beautiful, is very difficult to sing and chant notation is notoriously difficult to sight read. But aside from Gregorian chant, there is a plethora of Catholic hymns, Latin and vernacular that the Church recognizes as appropriate and edifying for the laity. But even with these options, there is an overreliance on the mike. Day expresses his distaste for the way many cantors in Catholic parishes sing.

... (the cantor) roars into the microphone at the top of his voice in a duet with the organist, while most of the assembled worshippers watch in stupefied silence. Sometimes the congregation tries to project its singing, sometimes the organ tries to assert its presence but, whatever happens, Mr. Caruso makes sure that his voice, his immensely amplified voice, will always be the loudest one there and will crest over the sound made by everyone else...One loud voice, magnified to unnatural proportions, produces what could be called a “command sound”. Instead of conveying the message “Join me,” this type of loud singing orders the congregation to listen.⁷⁵

In addition, there was also the introduction of folk music into the Mass. The proponents of this argued that:

1. This type of music was “what the people want”
2. Vatican II had opened up a new ear in liturgy and this was the only music that had been inspired by that council.
3. The composers and performers of this music were all Spirit-guided; for that reason, they could never be criticized.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, accessed March 2, 2021.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

⁷⁵ Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, 56-57

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 65.

Day calls this mindset narcissism and gives some examples of songs that display this sort of self exaltation:

- “Gonna Sing My Lord” by Joe Wise: In this song the constantly repeated message is that “I” sing “for all I’m worth”
- “All that I Am” by Sebastian Temple: The word “I” appears fifteen times in two small pages. The implication of the text is that in the Mass the congregation offers “I”, something truly wonderful, a spotless oblation lifted to the Father.
- “When I Sing, the Spirit Sings with Me” by Jack H. Miffleton: With repeats, the words “I” and “me” are sung twenty-one time each - a record for a piece of music that takes up only one small page.⁷⁷

Day also gives the example of new hymns that have the laity sing lyrics from God’s point of view. Some of these songs are, “I am the Bread of Life” by Suzanne Toolan, “I am the Resurrection” by Jim Anderson, and “I am the Vine” by Bob Hurd (Day gives a total list of twenty-six songs).⁷⁸

One of the most powerful things about music is its ability to create an atmosphere. The saccharine nature of this music naturally led to a sentimental atmosphere which had a tendency to place emphasis on the individual rather than God. This medium of music places a strong emphasis on worshipper’s emotions and the performances of musicians which can obscure the objectivity of the Mass. Its Christocentric nature gets diminished by these personalities and performances. The absence of silence can also lead to an absence of contemplation by the laity. By abandoning sacred music for folk music in Mass, parish liturgists send the message (consciously or not) that individual expression takes precedence over objective worship.

⁷⁷ Day, *Why Catholics Can’t Sing*, 65

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 73.

CONCLUSION

In David Carlin's *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America*, he argues that the convergence of three factors led to the breakdown of the Catholic Church in America. They are, "Vatican II, the full Americanization of United States Catholics, and the great cultural revolution of the 60s and 70s".⁷⁹ The Americanization of United States Catholics was in many ways accelerated by the liturgical reforms of Vatican II as Catholic worship became more palatable to the Protestant majority. The problem was that in the years after Vatican II, there was an immediate decline. Carlin gives some statistics:

- Between 1965 and 2002, the number of priests in the United States dropped from 59,000 to 46,000, a drop of 22 percent.
- In 1965, the number of ordinations of new priests outnumbered the number of priests lost through death and departures by 725. In 1998, it was quite reversed, as deaths and departures outnumbered ordinations by 810.
- In 1965, there were 7.87 diocesan priests for every 10,000 Catholics; in 2002, there were 4.6, a decline of 41 percent.⁸⁰

Carlin explains that there were obviously many factors that led to this, but the effects of Vatican II could certainly not be ignored. He speaks of the paradox of Vatican II:

It has often been said that Vatican II rejected what has been called "triumphalism" - meant to describe the attitudes of those traditional Catholics who were so confident of the superiority of their Faith that they felt Catholicism had little of nothing to learn from the outside world...

But there was another kind of Catholic triumphalism at the time of the Second Vatican Council - not the kind that closes itself off from the outer world, but the kind that is so confident of Catholicism's superiority that it *opens* itself to secular modernity with no adequate sense of the danger the latter poses for Catholicism.⁸¹

⁷⁹ David Carlin, *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America* (Manchest, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 2003), 319

⁸⁰ Ibid, 389-390.

⁸¹ Ibid, 344.

Day refers to this new triumphalism as the disruption of the equilibrium of what he calls “hardness” and “softness” in the Church.

Roman Catholicism has a long history of defending the “hard” image of God - such as the trinity, the Incarnation, Calvary, the Lamb of God slain for sins, and the intricate dogmas of the Mass... But constantly insisting on dogmatic “hardness” - that is no way to run a business, especially a universal religion. This is why Catholicism also has a long history of directing the believer to the “softer”, more approachable aspects of the faith, like the Sacred Heart, the Virgin Mary, the saints...The hard and soft peacefully coexisted in Roman Catholicism for centuries. The priest at the altar tended to the “hard” business of the faith; behind him, many members of the congregation indulged themselves in the more personal dimension of the same faith... When the Latin Mass virtually disappeared, the dam broke. Catholic worship in the United States was flooded with wave after wave of softness.⁸²

I have not been arguing that Vatican II should have never happened and that the liturgy and Church were perfect before and nothing had to be done to it. Rather, I am asserting that the large scale implementation of these reforms were carried out in a way which harmed the faithful’s understanding of the nature of the Mass. While the words and language of the Mass were more easily heard and the priest more easily seen, the message was often obscured. The changes, which often gave the Mass a more casual nature, hid the perception of supernatural realities. The *figure* was easier to perceive, but the *ground* was harder to recognize. This is the difference between “active participation” and “actual participation”. McLuhan explains the difference between listening and hearing:

To express their idea of communication, the kids use terms from the electronic and acoustic worlds: to be right on, to be with it, to be in, to catch the right vibes, turn on, and tune in. And that is the message of St John’s Gospel: “May those who have ears to hear, let them hear” [actually Matthew 11:15], that is, tune in to the right frequency. Most people, however, do not have ears for hearing, but only for listening. To listen is to blinker yourself, to restrict the eyes, as it were. To grasp the way the words arrive, what the speaker is saying. But to hear is to put yourself on the same wavelength as the speaker.

⁸² Day, *Why Catholics Can’t Sing*, 75-76

Christ himself uses this metaphor. He speaks of listening as opposed to hearing. The scribes were “listeners”, they looked at the texts... But they understood nothing. They had no ears for hearing, but only for listening...

Jesus also says: “My sheep know my voice. I know my sheep and they recognize my voice. But if you cannot hear me you are not part of my flock” [paraphrase of John 10:27]. He repeats several times in the Gospel of John, essentially: “Most of these people do not belong to my flock, they are on the wrong wavelength. If they hear my voice it is because the Father has turned them to the proper frequency. He programmed them from within to hear me”. St. John repeats it constantly. The Father has given me certain people who hear me, the others are content just to listen; they don’t tune their receivers. They grasp nothing. To them it’s all a great mystery”.⁸³

“The medium is the message” properly understood can be used analogously to the axiom mentioned earlier, *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. In the Church’s worship, all her doctrines and beliefs are communicated. The drastic changes implemented by the liturgical reforms of Vatican II carried an unintended message which did not effectively communicate the sacred and sacrificial nature of the Mass. At the very end of Latin Mass what is known the Last Gospel is read.⁸⁴ At a High Mass is it whispered by the priest, sometimes with the organ playing over it. At a Low Mass it is said aloud by the priest. The text of the Last Gospel comes from John 1:1-14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. **AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH** and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.⁸⁵

⁸³ M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Szklarek, *The Medium and the Light*, 99

⁸⁴ “A Comparison Between the Texts of the Traditional Missal and the New Missal of 2011”

⁸⁵ John 1:1-14 RSVCE

When the priest reads “ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST”⁸⁶, he and the congregation genuflect in order to show honor to the incarnation. In this passage if “Word” is replaced with “medium” and “light” is replaced with “message”, the passage still retains its meaning. This is because for McLuhan, “the medium is the message”, at its most fundamental level, was a translation of “AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH”.

⁸⁶ “A Comparison Between the Texts of the Traditional Missal and the New Missal of 2011”

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