

MEMORANDUM -- THE MASS ON TELEVISION

Although I have no idea when he will be in this country again, the possibility of utilizing the talents of Fr. Clifford Howell, S.J., might be considered. Probably his strong Englishness might make him unsuitable as a participant in U. S. television, but he would seem to have much to offer in preparing liturgical scripts; he is a genuine popularizer -- nothing has succeeded on the Mass like Of Sacraments and Sacrifice -- but he is also sound theologically and historically.

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Although I have great doubts about the "historical" approach to explaining the Mass, it has its place. Possibly the script (in Fr. Slayton's possession) of The Ancient Mass should be considered. It is in need of some adjustment, but it appears to present the historical approach in a graphic and intelligible fashion. (The author, Hugh Whittington, is in the business of writing TV scripts for the government I believe).

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So far as consultants on such Mass programs are concerned, dozens could be suggested. In addition to Godfrey Diekmann, I think immediately of Mary Perkins Ryan of Goffstown, N.H. She has a profound knowledge of the Mass, doctrine and structure, has certainly considered the problems of participation -- especially from the lay point of view -- and is a creative literary person.

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Again on the subject of consultants, I do think that great care should be taken in securing advice from priests. Many priests could give sound advice on most theological points and might well offer excellent suggestions in a creative way, but clerical education in the realm of the Mystical Body, the Sacraments, and the Mass, has been grievously defective for many years. The danger would be in getting help from one who would think that the "liturgical" side of the Mass could easily be done up in a hurry from a few books. (This is true even of very considerable "liberal" theologians, whose broadmindedness I fear stops short of the liturgical apostolate.)

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One possibility would be simply to televise an ideal parochial celebration, in a parish church where a high degree of participation has been achieved. This, if coupled with a good explanation, would be far better than any "demonstration."

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With regard to picturing things removed from the altar and church setting without disturbing the continuity, perhaps the example of the two French films on Holy Week could be followed.

In the present dispensation, I presume that a "Mass of the Future" would not be feasible as a subject for television -- although my personal feeling is that it is needed, or people will be sadly surprised when "reform" comes.

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Even if picturing a "restored Mass" would occasion too many raised eyebrows if not worse, I think that the possibility of such reform should always be in mind, if only negatively: it would be a mistake to stress aspects of the Mass which are likely to disappear in the next decade; it would be an error to urge the unchanging character of the Mass when it has ~~und~~ changed and will change.

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In all the "demonstrating" of Mass, I do not know of any demonstrations of high Mass. Yet the sung Mass is more authentic, simpler, easier to explain and understand. The possibility of presenting a high Mass, in ideal conditions, should certainly be considered.

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Probably all sorts of objections would be raised, but a picture of high Mass with texts sung in English might be very moving and revealing. Obviously some kind of disclaimer would have to be given, lest the sponsor be thought to be a vernacularist, and possibly a problem might arise because the source of most adaptations of the chant to English would be non-Catholic. Yet the meaning of Mass could be wonderfully shown in this way.

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Without resorting to singing, the possibility of choral speaking of the people's parts of Mass in English -- a real recited Mass demonstration -- is worth examining. I have never got to doing this, but I think that many groups would be willing to help in putting such a thing on.

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The following may be too "historical," but a device in which I have taken part is this: An introductory playlet -- one act affair -- with the apostolic band readying themselves for the celebration of the Eucharist, followed by a change to a modern altar and a demonstration of the Canon and Communion of Mass. Unfortunately I do not have the script of this; it was put on at Boston College and Holy Cross several years back.

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The setting of any Mass, real or imaginary, should be carefully considered. The Mass has many dramatic and even flamboyant aspects, the more so if it is solemn. This should be balanced by a great simplicity of appointments, furnishings etc. I am not necessarily

advocating any extremely modern, austere altar, etc., but certainly the other extreme is much more dangerous. Above all -- on this particular point -- I do not think that the Mass setting should be designed to be similar to the churches and altars with which people are familiar. This would only be the canonization of bad taste, and you might as well picture a living room with chintz curtains.

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In any Mass picturization, real or imaginary, the greatest attention should be paid to the distribution of roles or the differentiation of function. Since the Roman authorities in their decrees are pretty meager in their theorizing, little has been said on this point by way of definition, although the recent Instruction goes a long way. On the other hand, this is the whole point of much of the Holy Week revision, the Mass with deacon, the avoidance of duplication, etc. To my mind, this is the real opportunity of the camera, literally to take the viewer's attention away from the priest at the altar, when the priest at the altar is not the actor of the liturgical worship; the opposite is just as important of course, even more important, but it needs less stressing: everyone knows how important the priest is.

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I have no idea how to do this, but some thought should be given to the liturgical year. One aspect of the Mass that needs dramatizing -- it is one of the chief glories of the Roman Rite and a wonderful development in the West --- is the variety of prayer and text. We have not seen the collect unless we see it as the day's prayer, the way the Church pleads with the Lord for the sanctification of this day, etc.

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Without overemphasizing the dramatic aspects, there are some possibilities in the Church year that could be looked into -- e.g., the dramatization of Candlemas, the way the Church sanctifies the things of nature, oil, etc.

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These are very random thoughts, most of which deserve far greater consideration and development.

FRM