

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

What Do You Think?

We discussed in the pastoral council the other day the possibility of swapping the format of the Bulletin, replacing the present syndicated one from the Redemptorists (which, by the bye, costs more than 10p per sheet before we print our info on the back) with something we produce ourselves - like this, for instance - which can serve as a means of sharing the faith with those who can't be at Mass with us, or who belong to a different community, a different church, or to no Church at all. This would make the parish Bulletin a bit more local, and more at the service of St Hugh's, Lincoln - rather than the anonymous public addressed by a syndicated sheet. (It would also keep the parish priest's hand in at writing - a craft which tends to go rusty without use.)

Liturgy, Past And Present

One of the feelings we got when the liturgy first came over from Latin into English was an atmosphere of awakening. When religious people talk about awakening, they often mean something rather sentimental, like the Sleeping Beauty surfacing through a rosy reverie into an enchanting prospect of happiness. Awakening isn't really like that: mostly it's what we call a *rude* awakening, loud and too soon, sometimes with a full supporting cast of headache, hangover, and an illogical feeling of paranoia. Even very young babies can wake up feeling the whole world is against them. That's how the Catholic Church woke up when the liturgy changed: complaining bitterly at the noise, the necessity to talk and be talked to, the harsh experience of looking at one another and being looked at. For four centuries the only realistic way for most people to go to Mass was to kneel or sit quietly, while the priest silently got on with the business, and to be free to meditate. It became for many people a precious interlude of fifty minutes when no-one disturbed you, and you had time to yourself and time to pray. It made many people rich with meditative prayer, and the loudest sound was the rasp of rosary beads or the rustle of a devotional prayer-book, a murmur of Latin or a tinkle of bell from the east end, and the suppressed wail of some young Catholic being bounced into the porch for making unwanted noise. The idea

that the Church was above all else a place of reverent *silence* slowly took possession of us. It was never so in the beginning: the synagogue, on which our churches are modelled, was a place of discourse and dialogue, teaching, proclamation, and loud praise; it resounded with the words of the Scriptures, the music of the psalter, and the sermons of Rabbis - generally followed by discussion. This was not the tone of the Church I grew up in, and the movement out of the quiet and decorous into the loud and strident rawness of our first attempts at English liturgy was indeed a rude awakening.

I Miss The Peace

If we'd mistaken the Mass for the place of private prayer, it's not surprising. The old liturgy was very much a priest's world: it was in Latin, and arranged almost to suggest that it was his private business - his back to the congregation, much of the time praying in silence, words between the priest and God. The old practice of "following" the Mass with your translation in the Missal did little to create a unity out of a congregation. People now complained that they were *disturbed* by the presence of other people and by the constant demand to listen to this and join in that. They found the idea of praying together a dragooning of what had been a private world of personal devotion. It was really a hard time for many people. Worst of all, we came to pick new holes in the newly-exposed personalities of the Church: Fr so-and-so can't preach, Harry reads the reading like the weather forecast, I can't stand that music woman, I'm not having these ministers....the unmistakable attitudes of the unwillingly-awoken coloured our Church. I sense the need for us to put back the reflective, calming influence of prayer and meditation - not into the Liturgy, which is of its nature busy - but into our lives. I'd like to offer a few thoughts for people to look at in whatever peace and quiet they can find, when they are at home, and the sounds and sights of the liturgy have receded. There's a whole world of meditation for us to enter, which we can only access by ourselves, when we are alone. Meditation is a stage between waking and resting; it could bring healing and peace to us which we greatly need.

Fr Philip